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★CLASSIC★ ROCK

THE ANNUAL

12 MONTHS OF HIGH-VOLTAGE ROCK'N'ROLL

Starring

Black Sabbath
Queen ★ Guns N' Roses
Jimi Hendrix ★ Metallica
Led Zeppelin ★ Thin Lizzy
Neil Young ★ Deep Purple
Tina Turner ★ Ian Hunter
Aerosmith ★ The Police
Creedence Clearwater Revival

& More!

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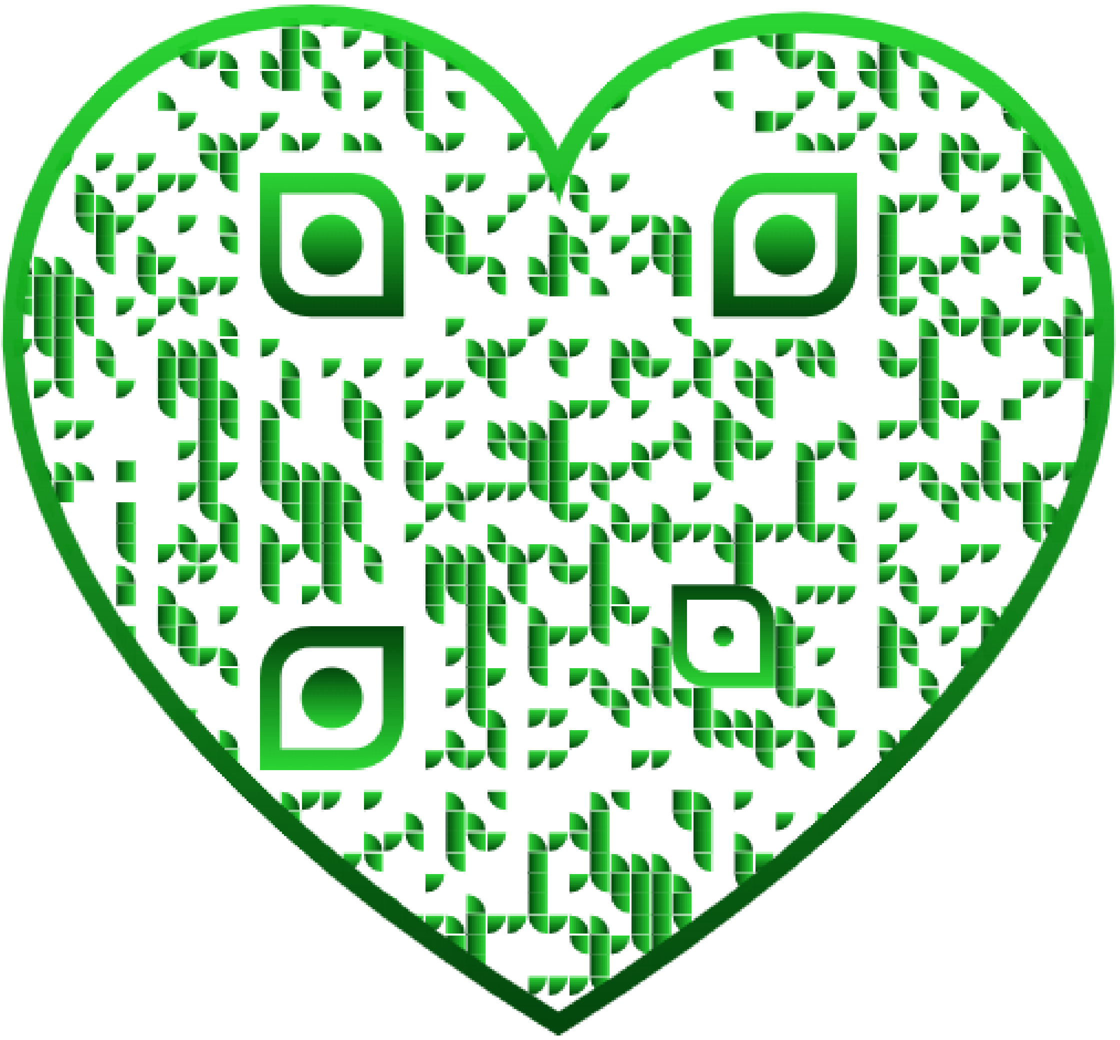

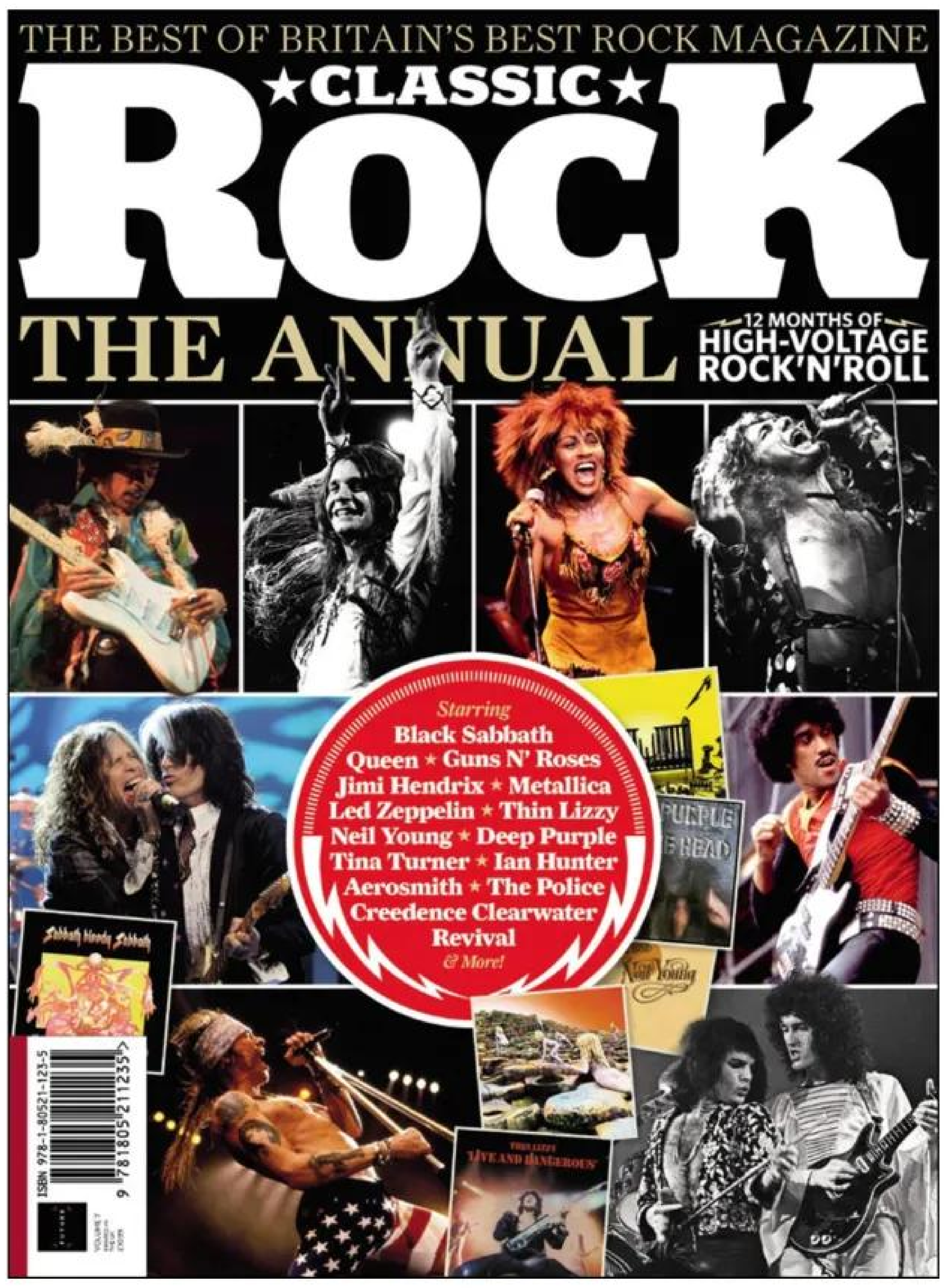

It's that time of year again! Yep, it's time for the annual *Classic Rock* magazine 'Best Of' to make an appearance. Thankfully, it's been yet another brilliant year of rock'n'roll reading, as the 140-odd pages that you're holding in your hand testify. This is our chance to collate some of our favourite stories and interviews that we ran in the mag over the last twelve months in one handy volume.

We've got the inside stories on the making of classic albums such as Thin Lizzy's *Live And Dangerous*, Led Zeppelin's *Houses Of The Holy*, Deep Purple's *Machine Head*, Neil Young's *Harvest*, and Black Sabbath's *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*… We collared Ian Hunter, Joe Perry and Andy Summers for the in-depth Classic Rock Interview. In the year we lost Tina Turner we took a look back at her incredible and storied life; talked to the members of Creedence Clearwater Revival about their amazing rise in the late 60s; celebrated the genius of Jimi Hendrix in what would have been his 80th year; took a deep dive into Guns N' Roses greatest songs and so much more.

I hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as we did putting them together. Until next year, then…

Siân Llewellyn,
Editor, Classic Rock

★CLASSIC★ ROCK THE ANNUAL

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Cover images
Jimi Hendrix: from JIMI by Janie Hendrix and John Mc Dermott. Published by Chronicle Chroma. Allan Koss / © Authentic Hendrix, LLC. Tina Turner, Robert Plant, Aerosmith, Phil Lynott, Axl Rose and Queen: Getty. Ozzy Osbourne: Avalon

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Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

Classic Rock Annual Volume 7 (MUB5552)

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In 2023 **Thin Lizzy**'s *Live And Dangerous* celebrates its 45th anniversary. Guitarists Brian Robertson and Scott Gorham look back at the troublesome birth of a classic live album.

Words: **Mark Blake**

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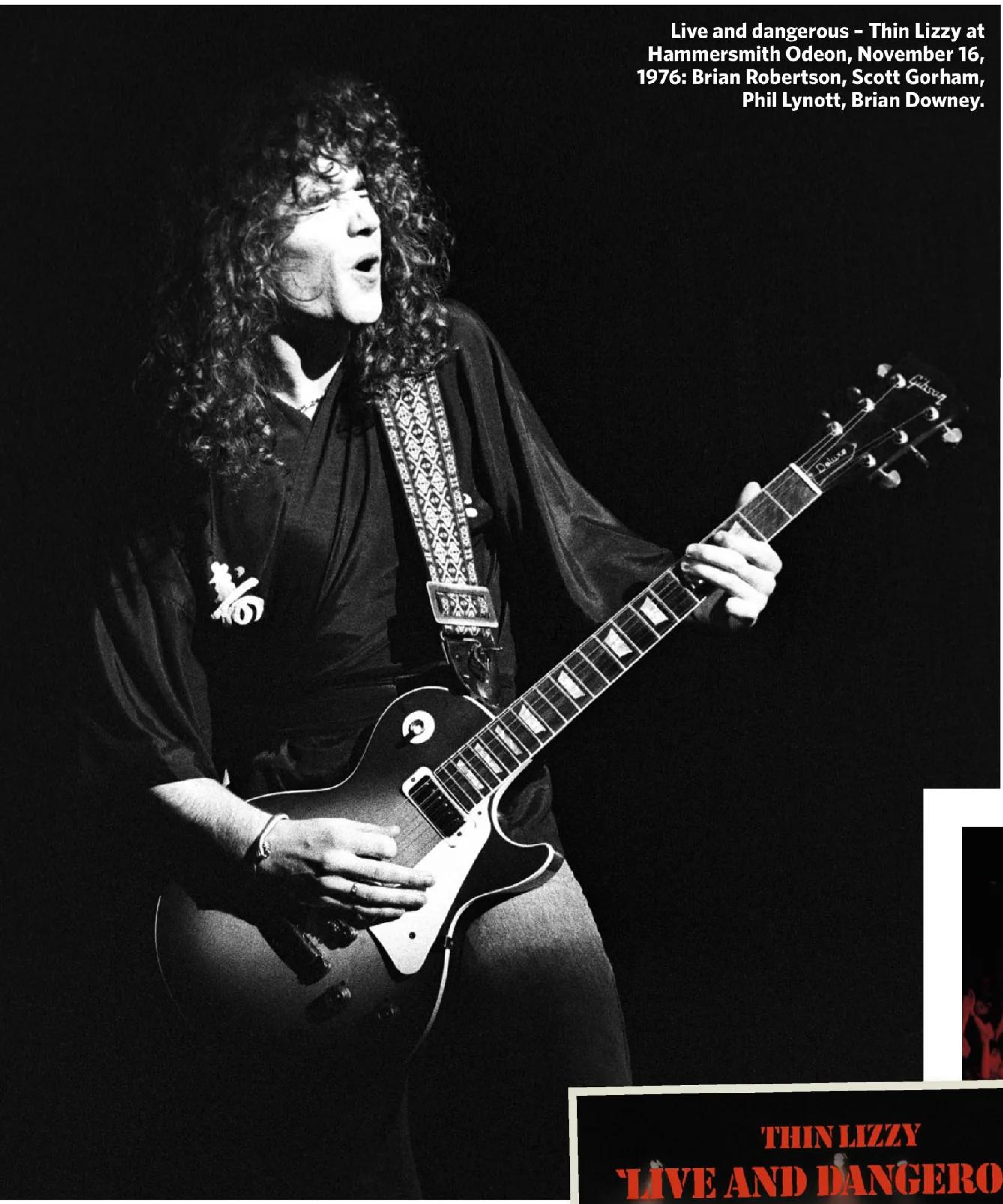
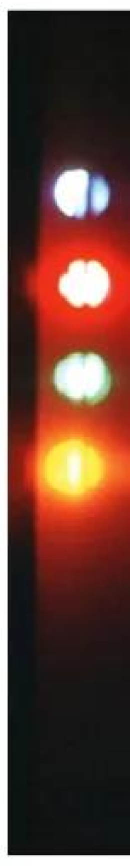
IAN DICKSON / GETTY



Live and dangerous – Thin Lizzy at Hammersmith Odeon, November 16, 1976: Brian Robertson, Scott Gorham, Phil Lynott, Brian Downey.

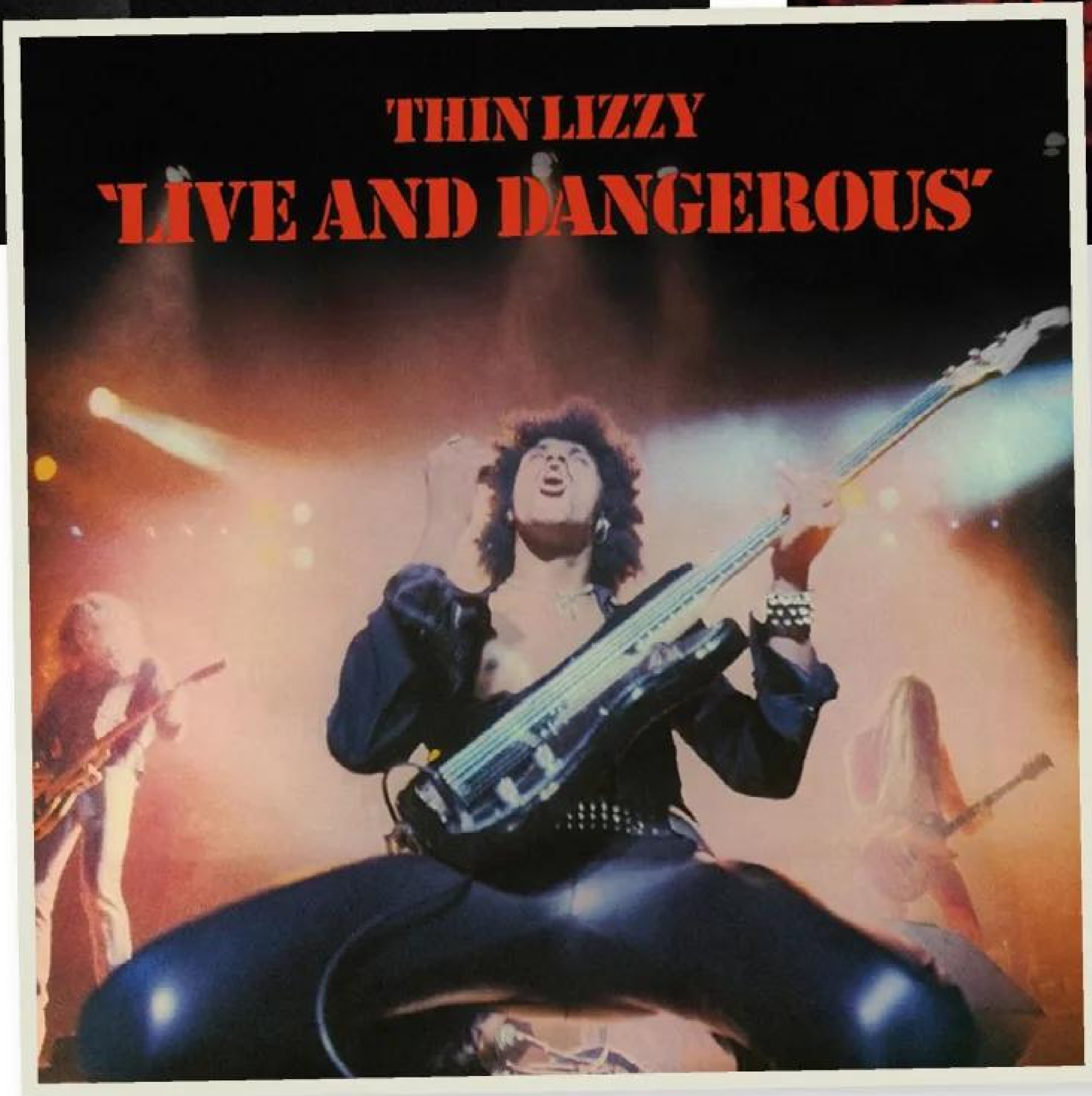


'Wah… wah-wah-wah-wah-waaah… *I wonder how you're feeling, there's ringing in my ears…'*

Another day in spring 1976, another strip mall in the American Midwest, and another blast of Peter Frampton's *Show Me The Way*. Thin Lizzy were touring the US and had stopped to buy cigarettes. *Show Me The Way,* and its chart-topping album *Frampton Comes Alive!,* were inescapable. Every time Lizzy got near a radio they heard that 'wah-wah-wah…' talk-box intro and then Frampton's audience screaming when he sang the song's opening line: *'I wonder how you're feeling…'*

Bass-playing Lizzy frontman Phil Lynott was well schooled in wowing an audience, but Frampton's noisy reception annoyed him. "It's a good song," says Lizzy's gatekeeper, guitarist Scott Gorham. "But after hearing it for the millionth time, Phil said: 'What the fuck, man. Why are they cheering? Is he turning somersaults? Gimme a break.'" After a pause, Lynott uttered the prophetic words: "We could do that. We could do it even better."

In June 1978, Lynott's boast became reality with *Live And Dangerous,* the album against which all past and present Lizzy releases would be measured. An upcoming 45th-anniversary super-deluxe edition proves that the answer to the eternal question: Which is the greatest live album of all time?, remains the same. *Live And Dangerous* captured Lizzy's on-stage swagger and joie de vivre, but also succeeded in bottling lightning. The 'dream team' of Lynott, Gorham, guitarist Brian Robertson and drummer Brian Downey were a combustible mix, and part of what made them such a thrilling live act eventually ripped them apart.



"I loved every second of it and I'm proud of it."

Brian Robertson

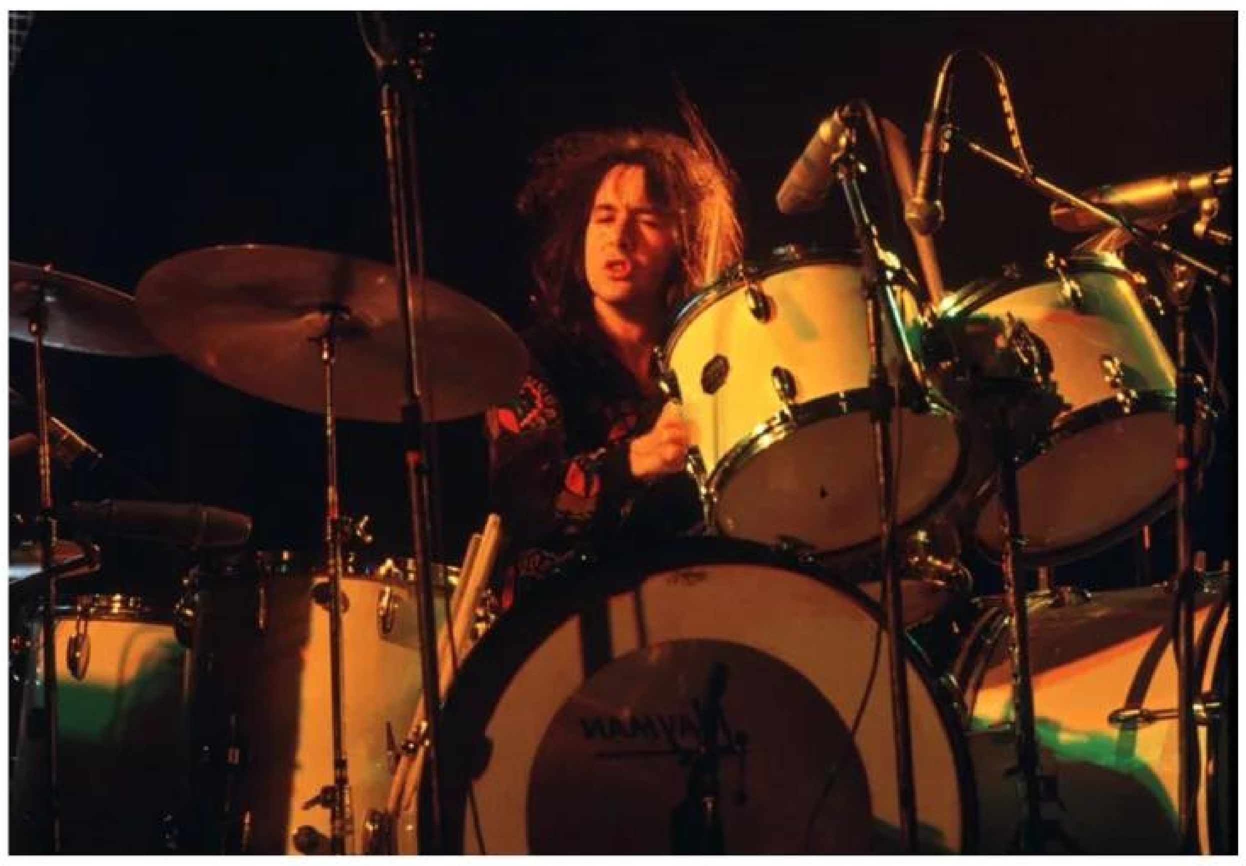
Gorham and Robertson, aka Robbo, are one of rock's great odd couples; like long-divorced parents who don't talk and only meet up at an offspring's wedding. Their offspring being *Live And Dangerous.*

"I loved every second of it and I'm proud of it," says Robertson today.

"There's just something about these songs that does it for me," says Gorham.

A self-professed "uppity little Scotsman", Robertson has been largely under the radar since his 2011 solo album *Diamonds And Dirt.* Where Robbo is blunt and critical, Gorham – all silvery hair and beard and smouldering vape – is a fount of polished anecdotes and positive energy. In February he guests with Black Star Riders (the band who started life as the redux Thin Lizzy) on their tenth-anniversary tour. After which he's hoping BSR frontman Ricky Warwick and friends will perform as Lizzy again.

The first steps towards *Live And Dangerous* were taken when Gorham and Robertson joined Thin Lizzy within days of each other. Part-Guyanese, part-Irish Phil Lynott had formed the group with Downey and original guitarist Eric Bell in their native Dublin in 1969.



The Cream/Hendrix-infatuated trio moved to London where their take on the traditional folk ballad *Whiskey In The Jar* went Top 10 in spring '73. Then Eric Bell walked out on New Year's Eve.

Northern Irish guitarist Gary Moore was among his temporary replacements, before Lynott found his dream team in May 1974. Robertson was just 18 and came from a family steeped in music; Gorham was a 22-year-old tearaway with a drug conviction before he fled Glendale, California, for London. Gorham's brother-in-law, drummer Bob Siebenberg, had just joined Supertramp, and Scott hoped the band needed a guitarist.

"Bobby getting that gig gave me the kick in the ass to work up enough money for a ticket to England," he says. "Then by the time I had the money, Supertramp's little Roger Hodgson decides he's going to play piano *and* guitar. But I decided to come over anyway."

Gorham found a £12-a-week gig with pub-rockers Fast Buck before he heard about a vacancy in Thin Lizzy: "I thought it was the dumbest name ever – what's a Thin Lizzy?"

He rocked up to his audition in London at the Iroko Country Club in Haverstock Hill with a cheap Japanese Les Paul copy and 30 days left on his visa. "I'd only been playing for three years, and I remember seeing Robbo and Brian Downey looking at my piece-of-shit guitar. Robbo's dad played in Art Blakey's band, for God's sake. My dad worked in construction and there was no real music in our house. Robbo had all his scales down, and I felt like the underdog."

Gorham was convinced he'd failed the audition, and was shocked when Lynott gave him the job. "The first thing Phil said was: 'We're gonna have to buy you another guitar, and if you stay in the band for six months you can keep it.'"

"I used to have to say to Scott: 'This is a minor, this is a major,'" Robertson recalls. "Scott used to work his solos out note for note using a little cassette player, and those notes are what he'd play for the rest of his life."

With gigs and studio time booked, the odd couple had to make it work.

"I brought an American influence into the band," suggests Gorham. "I don't want to say 'country', but it was a different influence. I got a kinship going with Phil because I was writing and bringing ideas to him. For all my non-expertise, I would write things for Brian Robertson to play."

Lynott was also sold on the idea of two guitarists for pragmatic reasons. "Because if one of those c**ts walks out, there'll be another one here," he said.

The new line-up released two albums, *Nightlife* and *Fighting*, inside of a year. The first included the future *Live And Dangerous* ballad *Still In Love With You*, and *Fighting* showcased Lizzy's cover of heartland rocker Bob Seger's *Rosalie* and Lynott's *Suicide*, both of which also appeared on the live album.

However, life in Lizzy was chaotic, and Gorham learned to referee between Robertson and Lynott. Anything could set them off: a bum note, a riff, a few days' stubble… When Robbo bowled up one afternoon with the beginnings of a beard, the moustachioed Lynott ordered him to shave, "because I'm the only one with facial hair". Robertson acceded only when Lynott threatened to fire him.

"Phil and I were always having a bit of ▷

"I don't think we'd have even chosen it [*The Boys Are Back In Town*] for the album but our managers liked it."

Scott Gorham

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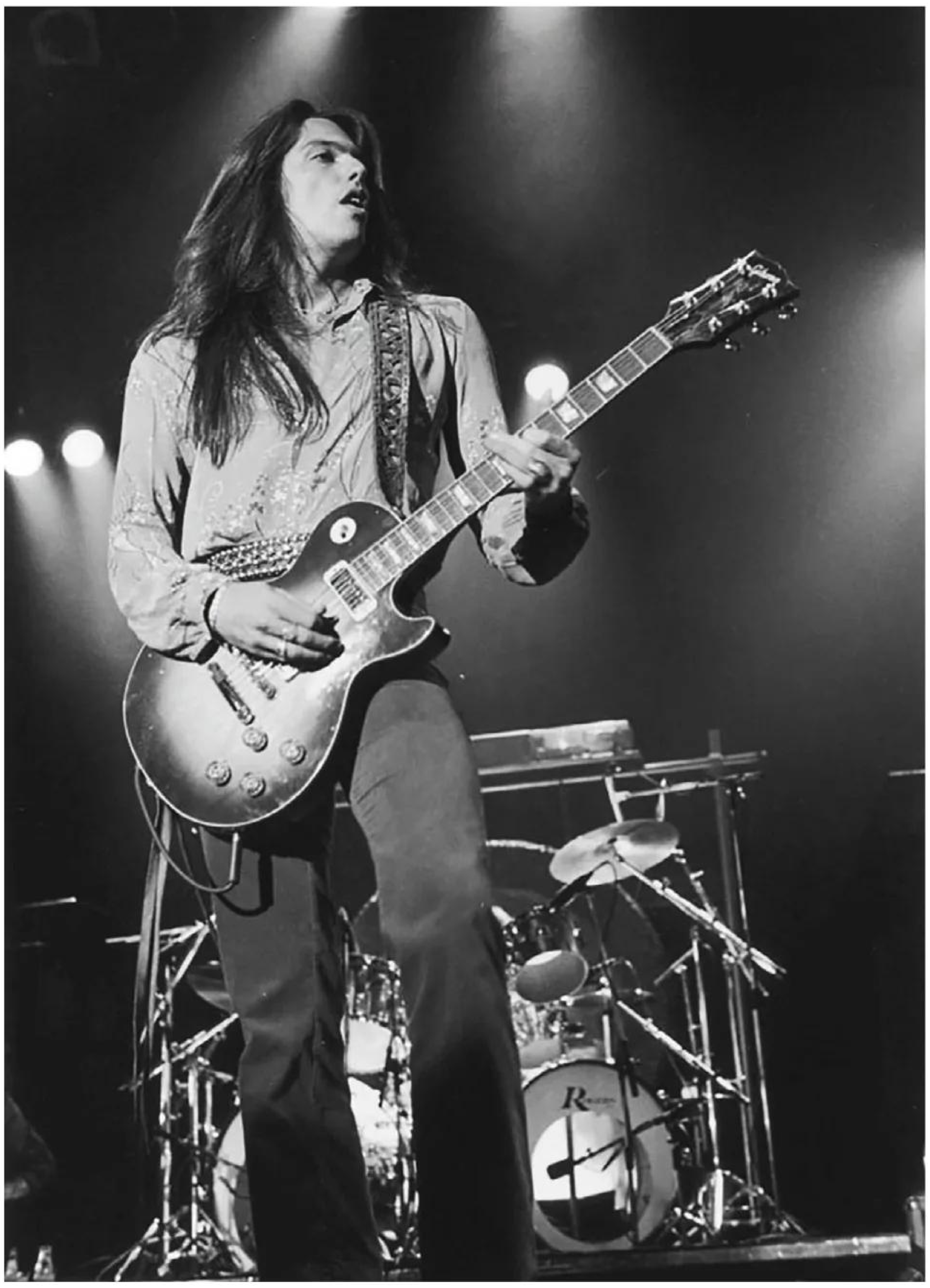
Robbo, Gorham and Lynott on the 1978 *Live And Dangerous* tour.



to-and-fro," says Robertson. "He treated me like a little brother – 'Oh for God's sake, Robbo!' And I'd go: 'Yeah, alright, uncle Phil.' That sibling rivalry cemented our relationship – personal and musical, all of it. He was never aggressive with me, only when I was out of order, which I could be."

"Robbo just he couldn't help himself," says Gorham. "It was Phil's band, and that raised Robbo's hackles. I'd say to Brian: 'All you got to do is talk these things out and come to an agreement.' But he just couldn't come to terms with it."

By winter 1975, though, the dream team were in trouble. Lizzy's label, Vertigo, were threatening to dump them for not selling enough records. The following year's *Jailbreak* was produced by John Alcock at The Who's bespoke Ramport Studios in Battersea, in a last-ditch attempt to turn it around. *Warrior, Emerald* and the album's title track explored Lynott's fascination with the outlaw life and spot-lit Gorham and Robertson's jousting guitars. Lizzy were finally getting there, and even let the label choose the next single.

"Until now we'd always picked them," explains Gorham. "We'd say: 'Oh yeah, this is going to be huge!', but every one of them was a dead fish." Vertigo picked *The Boys Are Back In Town*, a knockabout tale of boozing and brawling. "It was on the leftovers pile. I don't think we'd have even chosen it for the album, but our managers liked it."

On a US support tour with Rush in May '76, Lizzy discovered that *The Boys* was receiving heavy rotation on a Kentucky radio station. Other stations soon followed. "These DJs were playing it once an hour, then twice an hour. And then one of our managers walked into the dressing room and said: 'Congratulations, you've got a hit.'"

"We decided if we can't do the business in the studio, we'll show people we can do it on stage."

Scott Gorham

The Boys Are Back In Town reached No.12 in the US. Then, with imperfect timing, Lynott was diagnosed with hepatitis. "He'd lay on the floor of the dressing room after a show and the sweat would pool around him," recalls Gorham. "I'd say: 'That don't look too good, Phil…'"

The rest of the tour was cancelled, and Lynott recuperated by writing most of their next album.

That album, *Johnny The Fox*, arrived in October 1976, just seven months after *Jailbreak*. "We were always told: 'Never come off the road, because as soon as you do, everyone is going to forget about you,'" says Gorham. "So it was album, tour, album, tour…'"

"*Jailbreak* was the seminal Lizzy studio album – that and *Johnny The Fox*," believes Robertson. The album was filled with more tales of deadbeats, derring-do, doomed romance, sex and war. Its single *Don't Believe A Word* reached No.12 in the UK, giving Thin Lizzy another much-needed hit.

However hard they tried, though, the group never quite nailed it in the studio. "Call it 'red light fever', I just don't know," says Gorham, sounding exasperated. "We saw other bands doing it, but we couldn't capture it. When we discovered that a live album counted towards our four-album deal, we decided if we can't do the business in the studio, we'll show people we can do it on stage."

Lynott wanted a memento of Lizzy live, and Robertson wanted something comparable to his favourite live album, Humble Pie's *Rockin' The Fillmore*. Plans were made to record Lizzy's three-night run at London's Hammersmith Odeon in November '76. (All three dates are included in the super-deluxe edition, and are testament to how magnificent Thin Lizzy were when creative differences were put aside for the good of the band.) The final night culminated with Lizzy tearing through their early single *The Rocker*, followed by an after-show bash populated by various Sex Pistols and rock'n'roll footballer George Best. Then the wheels came off *again*.

A few days later, on the eve of another US

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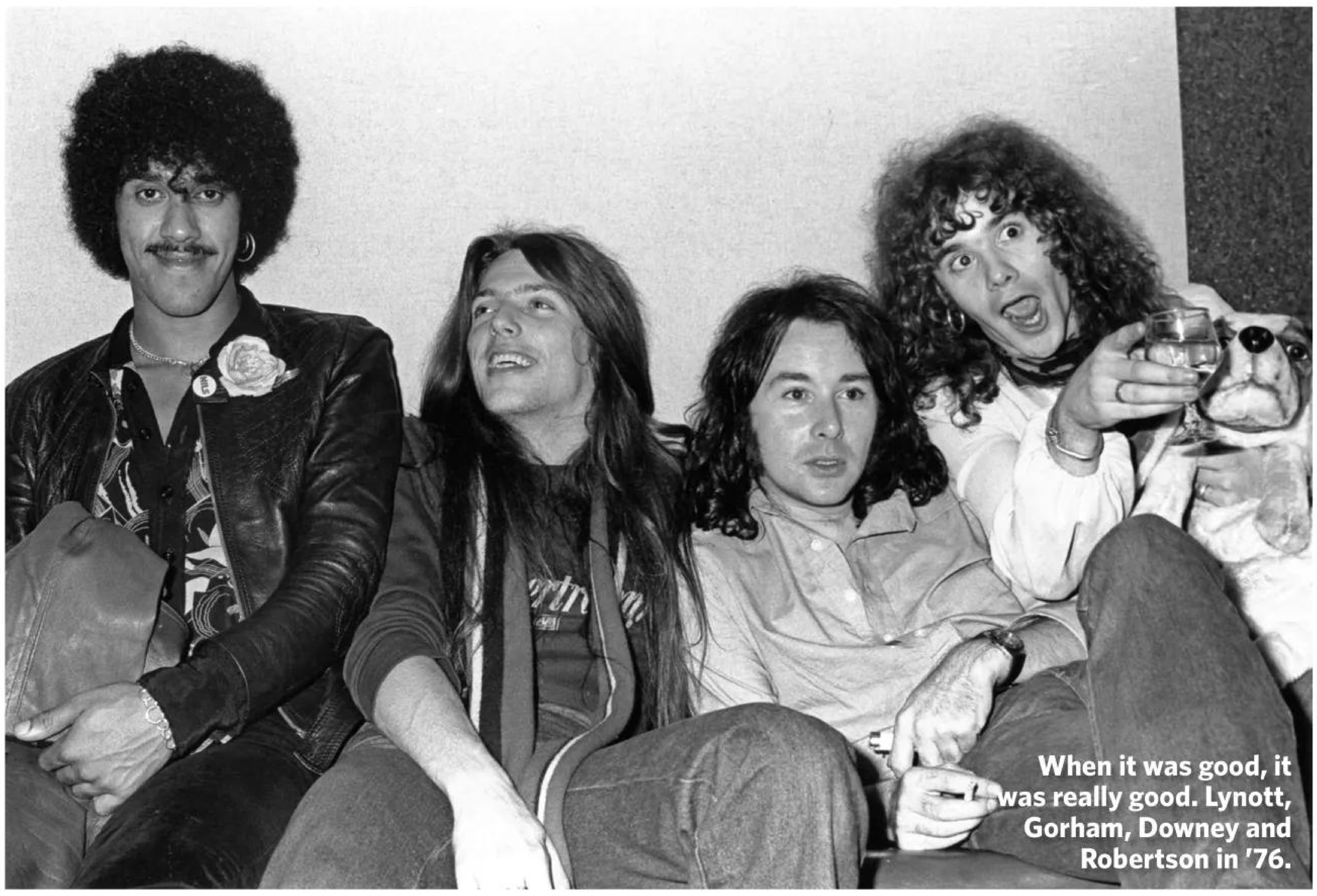

When it was good, it was really good. Lynott, Gorham, Downey and Robertson in '76.

tour, Gorham received an early-morning call telling him Robertson was injured. The guitarist had visited the Speakeasy, a musicians' watering hole in London's West End, and run into his friend, singer Frankie Miller. The house band, Gonzales, invited Robertson on stage to play.

A drunken Miller gatecrashed the performance. There was a scuffle in the dressing room, and Gonzales's guitarist Gordon Hunte lashed out with a broken bottle. Robertson stuck out his left hand to protect Miller's face, and the glass ripped through his palm, severing a tendon and an artery. "I said: 'Oh come on now, Gordon!' I never expected a fellow guitar player to do that."

A blood-soaked Robbo was taken to hospital in Paddington and stitched up. Lizzy's road crew were already in New York preparing for the first date, and Gorham's suitcase was packed.

"Phil phoned me, furious. What the fuck was Robbo doing down the Speakeasy the night before an American tour?"

"I'd gone for a pepper steak," says Robertson. "All these writers were later saying I was out of my head on whisky. I didn't have any whisky. I was living in absolute squalor with two groupies in Kilburn, putting fifty-pence pieces in the meter just to keep the gas on. Are you going to sit there all night, or go down the Speakeasy and get a pepper steak?

"I shouldn't have been down there that night, I know," he admits. "But I certainly wouldn't have reacted any differently in that situation. It took a long time to recuperate, but I actually thought it was good, because it slowed me down. I started going back to the blues… so every cloud, and all that."

Gorham pleaded with Lynott not to be too hasty, but he fired Robertson anyway. "He had to," says Robbo. "How can you play with one hand?"

Lizzy were forced to postpone a second US tour in six months, but Lynott was determined to get back there as quickly as possible.

"It was like somebody up there said: 'Here's the deal. We're going to give Thin Lizzy the rest of the world, but you cannot have America,'" suggests Gorham. "Our bad luck there was phenomenal."

Gorham craved recognition in his homeland, but says "Phil also wanted to be massive in America". Lynott's love of the culture seeped into his writing: in name-checks for *'First Street and Main'* in *Johnny The Fox Meets Jimmy The Weed*, and *'Dino's Bar And Grill'* in *The Boys Are Back In Town*. Lynott was thrilled to discover that Bruce Springsteen liked *The Boys Are Back*. "And I just heard Bob Dylan is a Thin Lizzy fan," claims Gorham. "Yeah, Bob, but where were you when we needed you, man?"

Instead, help came in the shape of stately British rockers Queen, who invited Lizzy to open on their spring 1977 US tour. Robertson had to have his wound restitched three times, because he kept pulling off the bandage and trying to play guitar. But Lynott wouldn't take him back. Instead he hired Gary Moore for the Queen dates. "The first time I ever properly met Gary Moore was at the airport," recalls Gorham.

"You make a live album to prove how good you are as a live band – and Lizzy was a great live band."

Scott Gorham

Moore and Lynott had a complex relationship. "The day Phil tells me we're having Gary, he's getting into a car and gives me a warning: 'You're gonna fall in love with this guy.' Then he rolls down the window and says: 'But don't ever trust him', and drives off. Thanks, Phil."

Did Lynott have an issue with guitar players? "In actual fact, I think he had a love affair with guitar players. If he could have had his druthers, he would have been a guitar player. Hendrix was his hero."

As predicted, after the tour Moore returned to his regular gig with jazz-rockers Colosseum. Lizzy's live album was abandoned temporarily, and the band prepared to make their eighth studio album, *Bad Reputation*, instead. Their management had landed T.Rex and Bowie producer Tony Visconti, and hoped he'd sprinkle some fairy dust over Lizzy.

However, Gorham was still angling to get Robertson back when they began work at Toronto Sound Studios. "I never wanted Lizzy to be a three-piece," he insists. "Tony kept telling me: 'You got this, Scott.' But I purposely left out three solos, and kept badgering Phil – 'We got to get the dream team back together.' We had another week left in the studio, and he relented – 'Alright, man, we'll get him back. But remember, it's not *if*, it's *when* he fucks up, man. And it'll be your fault.'"

Robertson reluctantly flew out to Toronto to finish the album. "But I was on a lot more than just three tracks," he says.

Released in June 1977, *Bad Reputation* was another UK Top 5 hit.

With Robertson reinstated, but under heavy manners, work resumed on *Live And Dangerous*. Three more dates were recorded on the subsequent tour: two at Philadelphia's Tower Theatre, and one at the Seneca College Fieldhouse in Toronto.

Tony Visconti was surprised to be asked to produce *Live And Dangerous*. Bowie even more so, when he discovered his producer was delaying his next album, *Lodger*, to work on a Thin Lizzy live record.

Freddie Mercury, Roger Taylor, John Deacon and Phil Lynott during the Queen/Lizzy 1977 US tour.

The truth is, Visconti loved the band, but not their increasingly parlous lifestyle.

"The drugs were taking hold at that point," says Robertson.

"I wish I could have been more like Brian Downey," admits Gorham: "'No, I'm not into this cocaine and heroin thing…'"

Nevertheless, Visconti signed up for the task of wading through 30 hours of live Lizzy, recorded on different kinds of tape at different speeds and by different engineers. Which is when the rumours began about how live *Live And Dangerous* really is.

In early 2020, Gorham was

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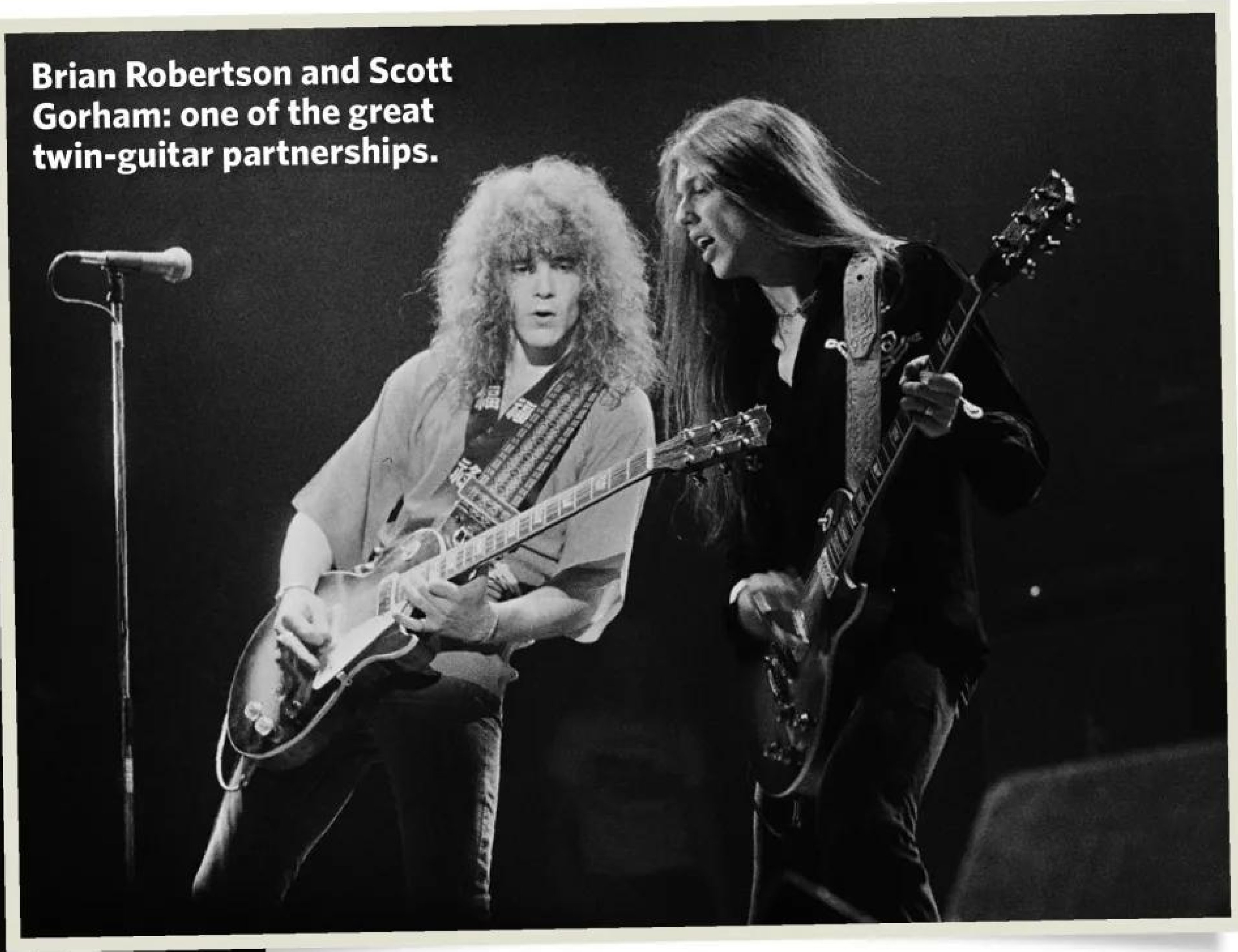


Brian Robertson and Scott Gorham: one of the great twin-guitar partnerships.

"Is there any of the girls that'd like a little more Irish in them?" On the '78 *Live And Dangerous* tour.

introduced to the former guitarist in a big 80s pop group, who told him that his previous band overdubbed most of their live album because that's what Thin Lizzy did with *Live And Dangerous.*

"They'd heard that seventy-five per cent of *Live And Dangerous* was overdubs," Gorham marvels. "I got kind of angry, and I probably shouldn't have, but I said: 'That's not the point here. You make a live album to prove how good you are as a live band' – and Lizzy was a great live band."

The source of the '75 per cent' rumour was Tony Visconti.

"I was totally gobsmacked when I heard that," says Robertson. "Tony was a great producer and a cool guy. He was at my wedding, for fuck's sake… I couldn't understand why he said that."

"It's bullshit," Gorham concurs.

Nevertheless, mistakes were rectified during the mixing at Studio Des Dames in Paris. Visconti says that Lynott re-did most of the bass, prompting Gorham and Robertson to correct some of their guitar parts. Some backing vocals were also re-recorded. And when Gorham tried to fix a dropped note, the band discovered it was easier if they re-did the rhythm track. "I was worried about cheating," Gorham admits. "But Tony said everybody did it."

One error couldn't be erased, though, and it's been bugging Gorham for more than 40 years. "There's a big old hairy clam on *Still In Love With You,*" he says.

On the night of the recording, Gorham was at the front, throwing shapes. Two women in the front row began massaging his leg. "I thought: 'Now this a great perk when you're doing your business.' But then I had to get back to my pedal board and they wouldn't let go." When they finally did, Gorham lost his footing and dropped a note.

"It's because Scott had those big red flares on," adds Robertson.

In the studio, not even Visconti's sleight of hand could fully disguise the glitch. "It's a bad edit," says Gorham. "And I can still hear it."

They were also short of material for a double album, and didn't want the likes of *It's Only Money* and *Soldier Of Fortune* on the (original) record. Instead, Visconti suggested plugging the gap with *Southbound* from the sound-check at Philadelphia. "Again we said: 'Really?' I guess we were kind of naïve," says Gorham.

Asked by this writer in 2020 how much of *Live And Dangerous* was overdubbed, Visconti replied: "It's been so long since I worked on this album, I can't specifically say what they replayed… But the percentages I've been quoted as saying were an estimate and would vary from song to song… I love *Live And Dangerous.*"

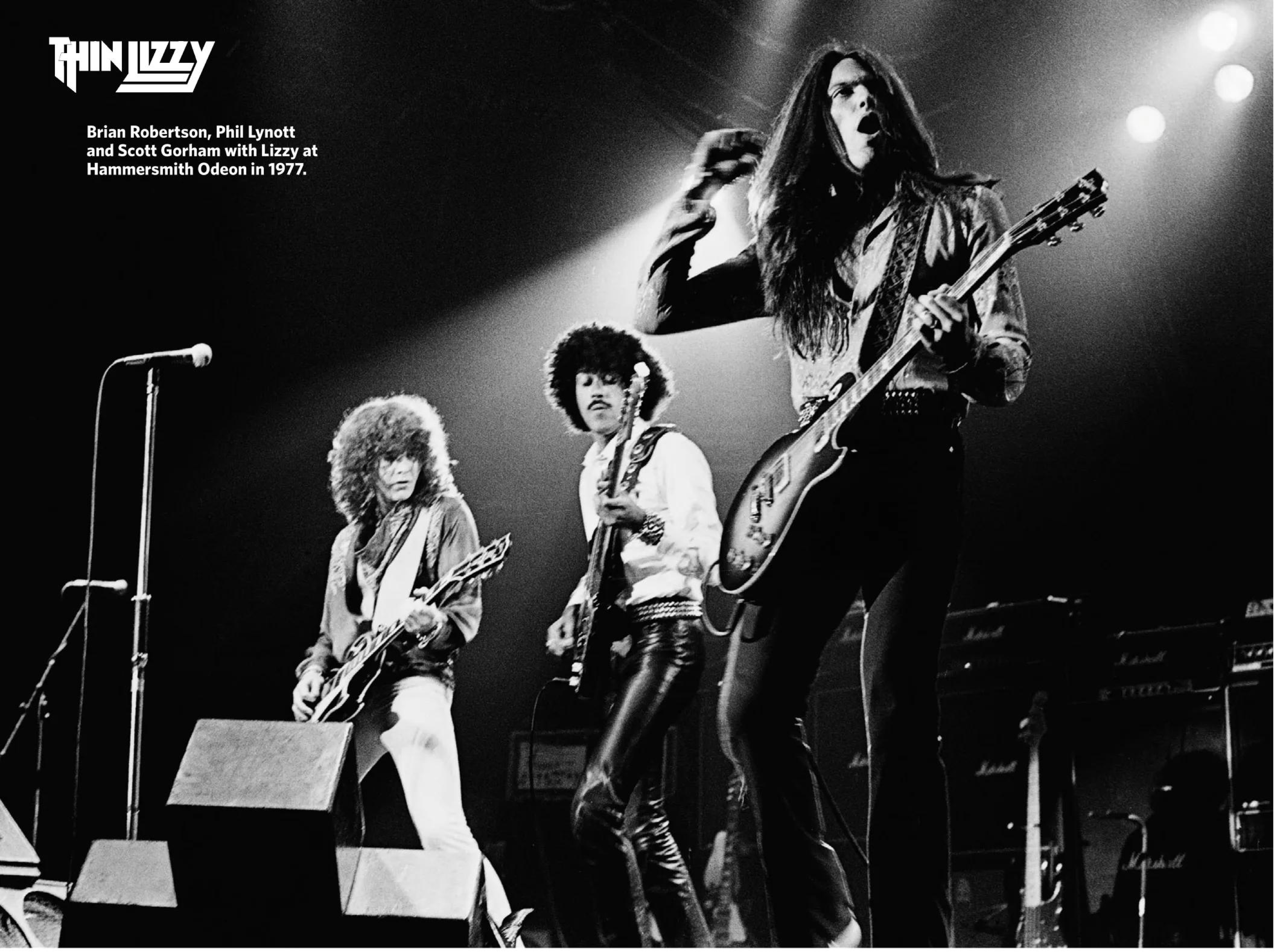
"I don't know if we were great, but we strove to be great."

Brian Robertson

The record-buying public shared his affection, and made it a No.2 UK hit, kept off the top only by the soundtrack to the hit film *Grease. Live And Dangerous* was the sound of Thin Lizzy roaming free, untroubled by "red-light fever". *Emerald, The Boys Are Back In Town* and *Don't Believe A Word* sounded like a band, in Gorham's words, "flying on adrenalin". So convincing was it, Gorham later forgot that *Rosalie* wasn't a Lizzy original. "I knew it was a Bob Seger song, really, but it felt like we'd made it our own," he says with a laugh. "The original is too slow."

Live And Dangerous also précised Lizzy's easy mix of machismo and vulnerability. For every *Massacre* or *Warriors* there was a *Still In Love With You* or a *Dancing In The Moonlight (It's Caught Me In Its Spotlight),* the latter one of the greatest songs about fumbling adolescent romance. Lynott's piratical charm and showmanship was in full effect too. It's impossible to listen to the original *Emerald*

MAIN: ROSS HALFIN; INSET: GETTY



Brian Robertson, Phil Lynott and Scott Gorham with Lizzy at Hammersmith Odeon in 1977.

without thinking about of its un-PC live-album intro: "Is there any of the girls that'd like a little more Irish in them?" Even today, when Thin Lizzy play those songs, audiences instinctively mimic Lynott's *Live And Dangerous* ad-libs: clapping their hands the way he told them to ("And I move my fingers up and down, up and down…") or doing their best 'coyote call' during *The Cowboy Song*. "That was Phil's power – the way he could connect with an audience, says Gorham.

The final touch was photographer Chalkie Davies's arresting cover shot, showing Lynott, leather-trousered legs spread, cradling his bass and staring into the middle distance. "Phil never wanted that as the cover photo," reveals Gorham. "He kept saying: 'Thin Lizzy is a band', and we kept saying: 'Yeah, but just look at that photo – that's the one.'"

The impression of Thin Lizzy as a gang was compounded by the photographs on the inside gatefold and inner sleeves. Naturally, Gorham's red flares made an appearance. The group's co-manager Chris O'Donnell had attended a piano recital at the Royal Festival Hall, where he watched an audience member follow the pianist's notes on a musical score. O'Donnell suggested 17 photographs on the gatefold, one from each song, so listeners could follow the music. The eighteenth photo was chosen by Lynott and showed straw, a razor blade and a rolled-up banknote – a glimpse of the recreational habits that would eventually derail him.

In true Thin Lizzy style, they even toured the live album, culminating with two dates at London's Wembley Arena. Then Lynott and Robertson clashed again.

"Brian fucked up, but I can't remember what happened," says Gorham. "I'm not trying to keep secrets. I was always defending Brian, but I just couldn't defend him this time."

It was a culmination of too much fighting, boozing, drugging and challenging Lynott's authority. Robertson played his last gig with Thin Lizzy at the Ibiza Music Show on July 6, 1978. "It was a sad moment," says Gorham. "I never wanted to see Brian go."

Does he regret parting ways with Lizzy?

"Yeah," Robertson replies flatly. "The Lizzy sound is *Jailbreak*, *Johnny The Fox* and *Live And Dangerous*… I don't know if we were great, but we strove to be great."

"We developed that sound together – me and Brian. We tore it up," says Gorham.

With Robbo gone, Lizzy reunited temporarily with Gary Moore, before adopting a heavier sound in the early 80s. "It was all a bit 'Zzzzzzzz' and 'widdly widdly' for me," Robertson protests. "Lizzy were never heavy metal."

"Really, there isn't a damn thing I'd change about it. It's not perfect, but it's us. It's a piece of history."

Scott Gorham

In 1983, though, Robertson saw *The Comic Strip Presents Bad News Tour*, a TV comedy in which 'Vim Fuego', played by Ade Edmondson, tells fellow guitarist 'Den Dennis' (Nigel Planer) that their group, Bad News, are hard rock, "not heavy metal". "And it really hit home, because that's exactly what I'd been saying in interviews. And I thought: 'You're a twat, Robbo,'" he says, laughing. "But it's true; we weren't like Judas Priest going [growling] *'Breaking the law, breaking the law…'*"

There aren't any plans for Robertson and Gorham to reunite when Thin Lizzy go back on the road. In fact, Gorham once compared the pair's relationship to "sticking cats in a burlap bag". "But people always ask me: 'Who was the guy you enjoyed playing with the most?' And my answer is always: 'Brian Robertson.'"

The rebooted *Live And Dangerous* is the musical equivalent of viewing a Hollywood blockbuster from new angles and gorging on the deleted scenes. Its songs are still the foundation for every Thin Lizzy show. "Really, there isn't a damn thing I'd change about it," says Gorham. "It's not perfect, but it's us. It's a piece of history."

Has he ever told Peter Frampton how much his live album inspired them?

"No, I never have," he says, grinning. "But if he's reading this: 'Peter, thanks for *Show Me The Way*. We owe you.'"

Live And Dangerous 45th Anniversary Deluxe Edition is out now via UMG.

GETTY

The Soundtrack Of My Life

Jethro Tull mainman ***Ian Anderson***, on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Grant Moon**

IAN ANDERSON: WILL IRELAND; LOU GRAMM: GETTY

T first Jethro Tull studio album for nearly 20 years, *The Zealot Gene* landed high in our Albums Of 2022 list. Mainman Ian Anderson may be 75, but his talents as a songwriter, flautist and frontman remain undimmed. With the follow-up album done and due next year, we asked this prog god for his Soundtrack selections.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

In The Mood by Glenn Miller and his orchestra. I was about six. My father had a few treasured wartime records, mostly big-band stuff. I remember having an epiphany, because *In The Mood* introduces you to the elements of blues, effectively. That was my first moment of thinking: "Hmm, this music is something special…"

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

Around 1964 [early Tull members] John Evan, Jeffrey Hammond and I dared to play a few songs at the youth club of the Holy Family Church in Blackpool. Among them was *Walking The Dog* by Rufus Thomas, as covered by the Rolling Stones. We knew the Stones were a fake, so we went back to find the originals of the music they covered, then did it our own way – in a not dissimilar fake fashion to the Rolling Stones!

THE GUITAR HERO

In the early Fleetwood Mac days Peter Green had a real soulful quality. He could make a guitar sing like a human voice. Peter had this wonderful tone, wonderful control. He could play a lot of notes when the music warranted it, otherwise he seduced you with quality rather than quantity.

BEST SONGWRITER

Roy Harper. From 1968 to 1970 I bought his records, and he stood apart from other songwriters of the era, because he covered a lot of range, from political and social issues through to plain and simple, stoned love songs. I'm always drawn back to *Come Out Fighting Genghis Smith* ['68]. I'd just moved to London myself, and it resonated with me. So hats off to Roy Harper, as Led Zeppelin once said.

THE SINGER

Head and shoulders above all rock singers for me is Lou Gramm. Incredible precision and diction – you can hear every word he sings, unlike the majority of singers before and since. He had decorative elements in his delivery that weren't overdone – mainly he sang on the beat, in tune and with great emotion.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

The Deutsche Grammophon recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, conducted by Herbert von Karajan, from around 1962. I became besotted with his symphonies, particularly the Ninth, and it's stayed with me all my life. Not very rock'n'roll, but in a different kind of a way, yes it *is* rock'n'roll.

THE BEST RECORD I EVER MADE

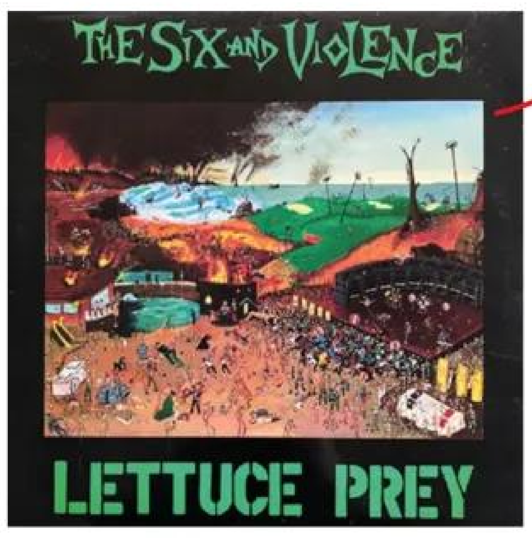
The one I've just finished recording. If people liked *The Zealot Gene*, they'll like the new one more. But if you were trying to pin me down for a record you might know, then I might go for *Songs From The Wood* [1977].

THE WORST RECORD I EVER MADE

The song *Singing All Day* is a stinker. A throwaway track that we immediately sidelined until we were desperate for some material for a compilation album we had to make under contract with Warner Brothers. It came from the bottom of the barrel. A real turkey.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

The Six And Violence were a bunch of guys from New York who played thrash metal. They were violent on stage but absolute pussycats off it. I played on [1990 debut] *Lettuce Prey*. They struggled on manfully for a few years but never got the breaks. I always thought they deserved better.



MY BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

When Frank Zappa was terminally ill, I received a message to say he would like me to call him. I'd never met him. I was a fan, but my instinct was he really didn't like Jethro Tull, so it was a little odd. I dialled the number three times, but each time I hung up in panic; I was embarrassed – what do you say to a dying man? A few weeks later he died. From what I heard he'd wanted to talk to a few people, just to say hi, and I was one of them. It wouldn't have changed anything, except I would have had my first and last words with one of the great original composers and performers of rock music history.

GUILTY PLEASURE

I have a soft spot for the brutal, simplistic music of Motörhead and the Ramones. And I like Marc Almond too. We have performed together regularly at Christmas, in fundraisers and cathedrals. That might surprise people – we're of a different era, personality and character, but we are good buddies.

MY 'IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE' SONG

Roy Harper's *Another Day*. A lot of people have been drawn to the romantic intimacy of the lyrics, and the languid orchestral arrangement on Roy's original recording. It's romantic first, and sexy second. It talks of intimacy in a respectful way.

THE SONG I WOULD LIKE TO BE PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

What A Wonderful World by Louis Armstrong. For several decades we've used it as the end-of-show music. It always seems to me a very fitting way of saying goodbye to a departing audience, so it would have a great resonance for me personally because of that fact. It's a song of gratitude, of thanks for a wonderful world which we live in.

"Head and shoulders above all rock singers for me is Lou Gramm."

THE ★CLASSIC★ ROCK INTERVIEW

JOE PERRY

Over the past 50 years he's been in (and out) of one of the biggest bands in the world, and enjoyed all the trappings that brings, not all of them healthy. Having achieved everything he set out to do and more, these days all the Aerosmith guitarist really wants to do is play.

Interview: **Dave Everley** Portrait: **Ross Halfin**

Joe Perry is running late. This isn't unusual behaviour for an A-list rock'n'roll musician. But the Aerosmith guitarist isn't being a diva. It turns out his wife, Billie, found a dove with a broken leg near their Florida house and is trying to rescue it. Perry has been trying to find a box to put it in to keep it safe and calm it down.

"She's got the touch," he says of Billie when he arrives, apologising for the delay. "One time she found a baby rabbit up in New England, and it was nearly frozen solid. She took it inside, massaged it under warm water and brought it back to life. In another century I would have had to protect her from the people with the torches and the burning flames."

The 72-year-old Perry wears the mantle of guitarist with one of America's most famous, successful and occasionally combustible bands lightly. Where his Aerosmith bandmate and fellow former Toxic Twin Steven Tyler is a yapping mouth in human form, Perry is quieter, more thoughtful, even a little shy.

Things might have been different in the 70s or early 80s. Back then, Perry and his bandmates were permanently enveloped in a cloud of chemicals and had the glazed looks to prove it. But despite their enthusiasm for hard drugs and the rock'n'roll lifestyle in general, they still managed to deliver a string of stone-cold classic albums that turned excess into success: *Get Your Wings, Toys In The Attic, Rocks*, even *Draw The Line* (supposedly underwhelming but really not).

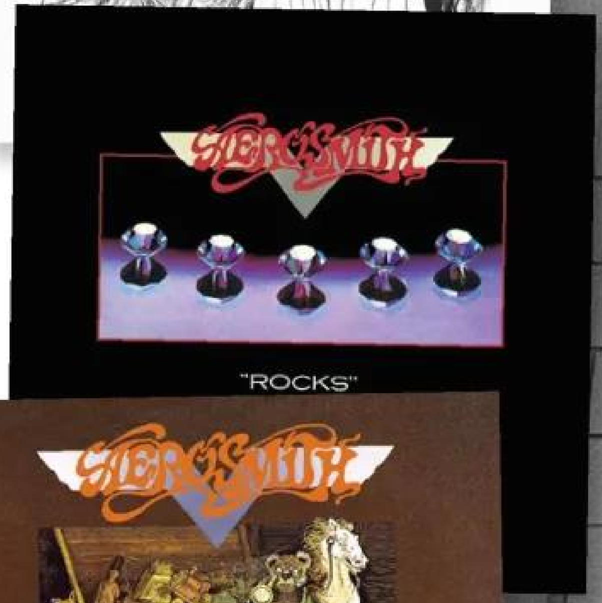
Perry quit Aerosmith in 1980, but his return four years later marked the beginning of a remarkable second act which was as successful as the first, with albums such as 1987's *Permanent Vacation*, 1989's *Pump* and 1993's *Get A Grip* turning them into global superstars, not just American ones. If Aerosmith's work rate has slowed down in the 21st century – just three studio albums since 2001, including the blues covers set *Honkin' On Bobo* – then Perry has kept himself busy, juggling a solo career with the million-dollar supergroup Hollywood Vampires, which he founded in 2012 with Alice Cooper and Johnny Depp.

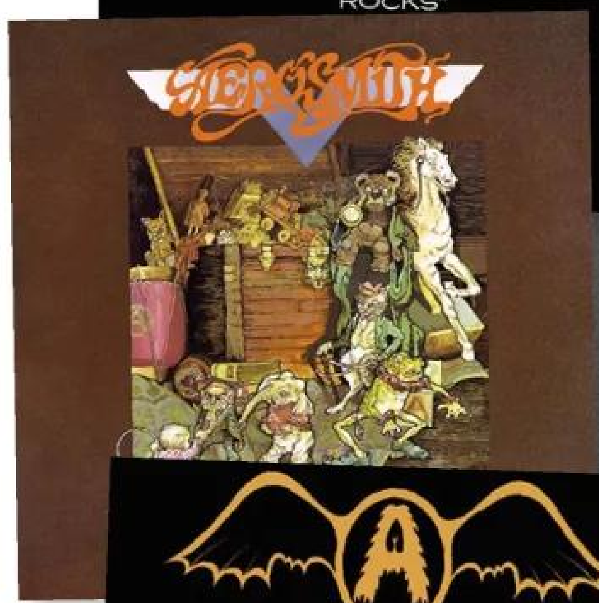
> **"I was always kind of an outsider at school, and I liked the idea of having a gang of outsiders."**

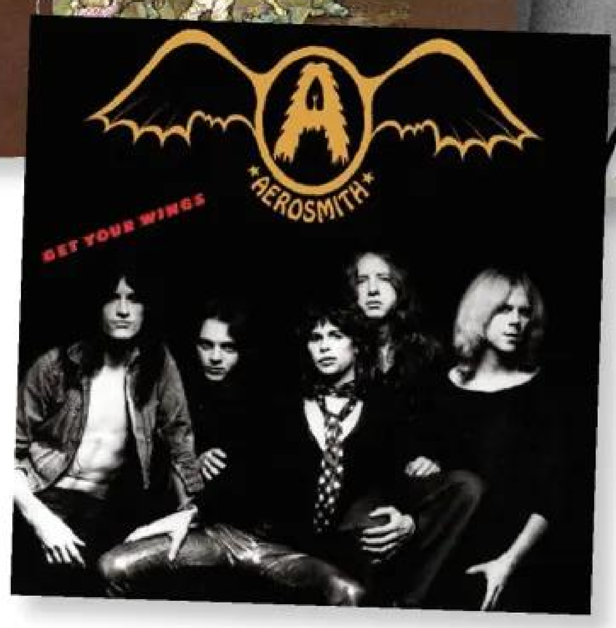
While in the background Billie pops in to tend to the stricken bird, Perry gets ready to look back on the metaphorical and literal highs of his head-spinning career. "We just wanted to make some noise," he says of Aerosmith's early days. They've done just that, and way more. ▷

Gretsch
Synchromatic

Perry with Aerosmith at RFK Stadium in Washington, DC, May 30, 1976.







Backstage at RFK Stadium: (l-r) Steven Tyler, Tom Hamilton, Joe Perry, Brad Whitford, Joey Kramer.

Before you took up guitar, you wanted to become a marine biologist. Why?

Every summer we went up to the lake area in New Hampshire where my parents had a little cottage, and I just loved being in the water. I did everything I could do to spend time underwater. As a kid I used to watch [oceanographer and filmmaker] Jacques Cousteau, I wanted to be part of his team. I had a chance to meet some of the scientists at Wood's Hole [oceanographic institute on Cape Cod near Boston] and they said: "You want to do this, that'd be great. Come back after you graduate college." But I did not excel at school back then.

Did that have something to do with your undiagnosed ADHD?

I dunno. It just didn't work with the way things were taught back then. I couldn't get a passing grade to save my life, so going to college was not on the table. But I loved music, I loved rock'n'roll, the whole thing, and I felt like there was something there for me beyond being in the audience.

What made you want to play rock'n'roll rather than just listen to it?

I was always kind of an outsider at school, and I liked the idea of having a gang of outsiders. At the high-school dance you'd have all the jocks on the dancefloor, and a couple of guys on the side of the stage watching the band. That was me.

Rock'n'roll was a place I could go and nobody told me "No". [Laughs] Except my parents. That's why I was a late starter at taking the guitar seriously. Being a star or an idol was not on top of my list. Being on stage with other guys, playing music, that was it.

Can you recall the very first time you played on stage?

I had a band with a couple of friends. We'd been playing in our garage, doing covers – Dylan, The Byrds, that kind of thing. We played at a party, stood in corner. That was fun. The three of us kind of stumbled through the songs. The next time, we did something a little bit more electric. We had a band called Flash, and we were influenced by all the great English bands – The Beatles, the Stones. We hired the local town hall, and the ten or twenty people who were there kind of danced along and nobody left. So I thought: "This is fun."

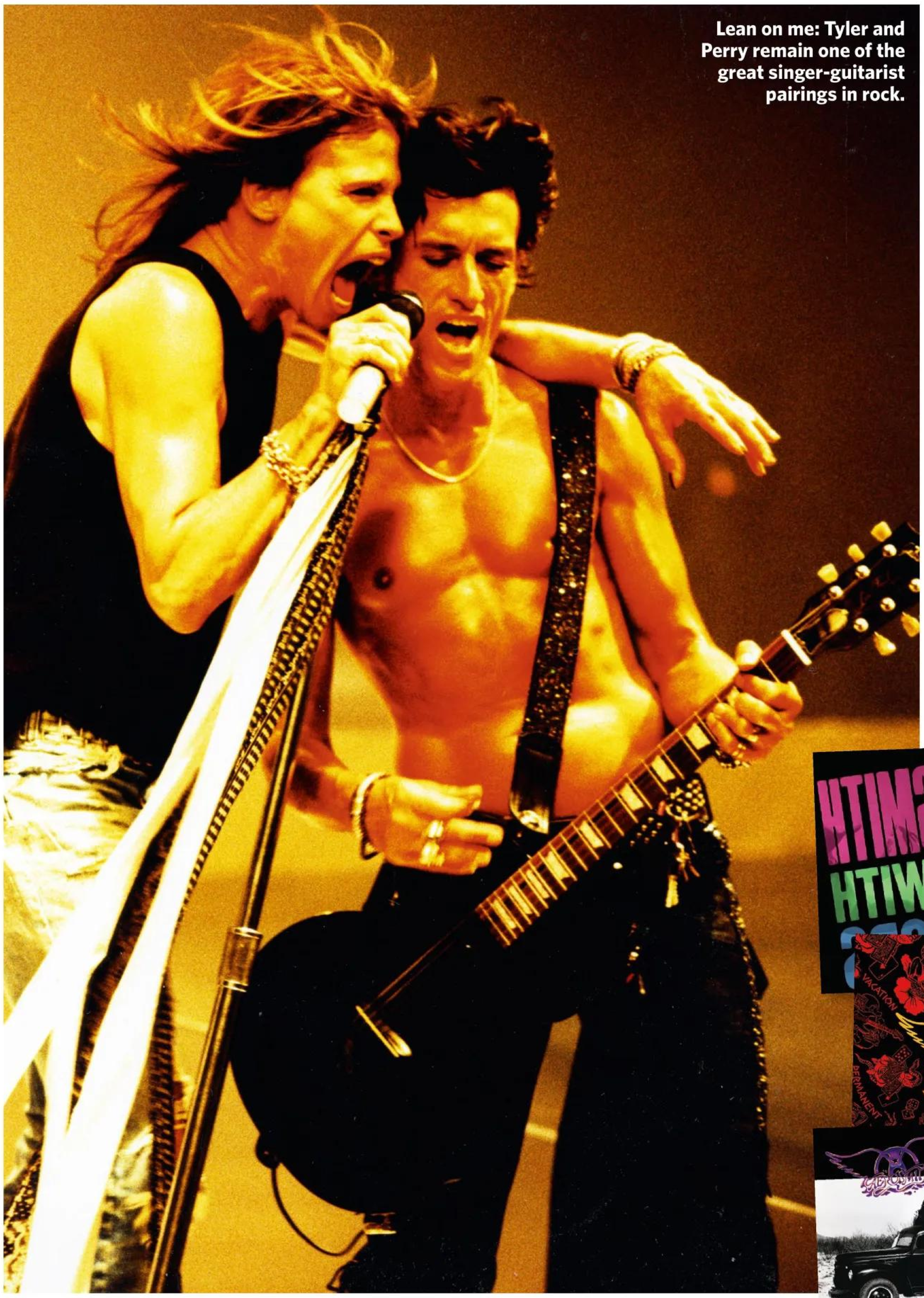
What did you think of Steven Tyler the first time you met him?

The first time I met him, I didn't really meet him, so to speak. I was working in a hamburger joint in the lake area, and I did everything from cooking the French fries to sweeping the floor and taking out the trash. His family had a place up there, a bed-and-breakfast kind of thing, and every summer he'd come up from New York with one of his bands. I remember them rolling in and basically behaving like what they thought rock stars should do, which was throw food at each other. So when they left I had to clean up after them. ⊳

GETTY x2

"It's amazing that we made it through those first two years. Rock'n'roll was not something you picked for career longevity."

BARON WOLMAN / ICONIC IMAGES



Lean on me: Tyler and Perry remain one of the great singer-guitarist pairings in rock.

"I remember the first thing I wrote sober, after coming out of the first rehab was the riff to *Hangman Jury*."

I kind of bumped elbows with him a few times after that. But the next summer my band with [future Aerosmith bassist] Tom Hamilton would go and play at a little club called The Barn. That's when I formally got introduced to Steven. He'd heard that the Jeff Beck Group were looking for a new singer. A friend of ours asked if we'd be his back-up band while he did a demo.

What did you record with him?
We did *I'm Down* by The Beatles. He was a singing drummer – he's an amazing drummer. And after that the two of us stayed and jammed for two or three hours. I think that's when he saw something that I had, and of course I'd heard him with other bands. I said: "Man, we're looking to go to Boston to form a band." We'd hang out at parties and talk seriously about it. And he said: "Yeah, I'll come to Boston. But I don't want to play drums, I want to be just the singer." And I said: "That's good, cos we've got this guy from New York called Joey Kramer who is thinking about being in the band…"

You probably never thought you'd still be playing with those guys fifty years later.
Oh man, of course not. It's amazing that we made it through those first two years. Rock'n'roll was not something you picked for career longevity. Think about all those bands that made it big, that had a big hit, then two years later they were gone. Even the Jeff Beck Group with Rod Stewart. Nobody had any inkling that it was going to be something that lasted. The whole thing was: "Don't trust anybody over thirty." Our vision was just to keep the calendar full for a month with gigs so we could pay the rent.

Speaking of paying the rent, in the band's early days the Aerosmith guys all lived together in an apartment in Boston. What the hell was that like?
Tom and I got this apartment that was cheap, and we were determined to fill it with a band, which is what we did. It was a great time to live in Boston. It's a college town and, we lived in this student ghetto. We fell right into that – same age group, only we had a different vision for what we wanted to do with our lives.

Did you get on with the neighbours?
Yeah. Our closest friend and associate was the building manager, Gary Cabozzi. He was this 250-to-300-pound ex-Vietnam vet who lived in the basement with his wife and kid. He was pretty greasy, he was missing teeth, his neck was pretty red, but he loved what we were doing. He was a big James Brown fan, and we were playing James Brown songs.

He became our guardian in the neighbourhood. There was one incident… I'm still not sure of all the real details, but there was a suitcase found outside the apartment, and someone had supposedly gone through it and put it back, and there had supposedly been a couple of thousand dollars and a couple of bags of pot in this suitcase that wasn't there.

It's later in the day, we're all in the apartment, and these guys started pounding on the apartment door: "Where's the money?" We're shaking our heads, looking at each other, and they pulled a gun. Then this guy Gary Cabozzi came crashing through the back-stair doorway with this old sword. He said: "Motherfucker, either you use that gun or I'm gonna fucking separate your head from your shoulders." And they backed down".

Your first manager, Frank Connelly, was big promoter in Boston and a well-connected figure. Did you find yourself rubbing shoulders with mob guys back in the early days?
It was never said in so many words, but we got the vibe that was what was going on. Frank was the main promoter in Boston for years – he brought The Beatles to town, Hendrix, Zeppelin. He wasn't really a manager, but he took us under his wing.

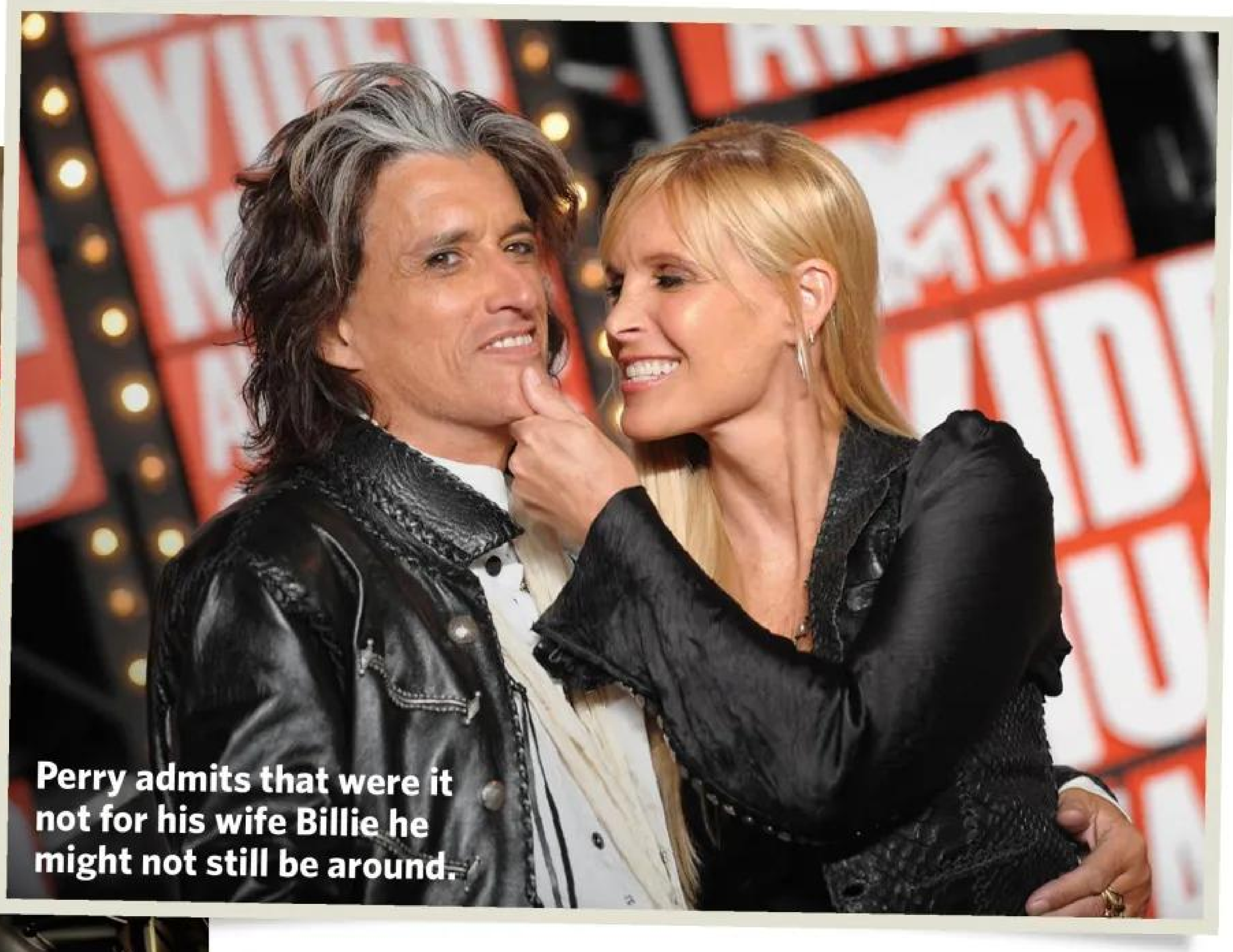
But he was also sick [with cancer] at that point. He didn't tell us, but he knew he didn't have long left on the planet. He's the one that introduced us to these guys in New York, [hotshot management company] Leber Krebs: "Listen, these guys, they're the ones that will be able to help you with your ᐅ

ROSS HALFIN

"I missed the Aerosmith thing. My head-to-head bullshit with Steven was just that – it was bullshit."

ROSS HALFIN

Back in the saddle (when he attaches one). Motorbikin' Perry in 2008.



Perry admits that were it not for his wife Billie he might not still be around.

career." He was an interesting guy, a real character. With me, he turned into a kind of father figure. I spent a lot of time at his place. He taught me a lot about life.

Aerosmith's first two albums were both great, but they didn't set the world on fire commercially. Was that frustrating?
It was almost like it didn't matter. We were used to being the underdogs. The J Geils Band ruled the roost in Boston, and rightly so, and we were the young upstarts. We were from out of town, so we were never really looked at as a Boston band. We hadn't played the clubs, we weren't part of that whole scene. It was a while before we became part of that whole thing, and by then we were off playing around the country.

The J Geils Band were the most incredible live band I can think of, and they owned Detroit. When Detroit heard that there was another band from Boston called Aerosmith, they gave us a chance. We were bigger there than we were in Boston, and when we came back, word had spread. We playing a thousand-seat theatre and there were kids outside who couldn't get in. I remember our manager, Frank, walking in with a pocket stuffed full of dollar bills. That was the moment when it started to feel like we weren't pushing rope uphill.

So after the first record didn't do what the label [CBS] wanted it to do, it didn't really matter to us. Nothing stopped us. It was all about us playing together, feeling the band getting better, seeing the reaction from the people. That was all that mattered.

Everything changed with the third album, *Toys In The Attic*, in 1975, and a reissued version of your debut single *Dream On*. Aerosmith were suddenly huge. What was it like being in the eye of the hurricane?
We weren't prepared for it, not at all. I remember watching Guns N' Roses going through it. There was that summer when they went from opening up for us to being one of the biggest bands around. That's the most exciting time for any artist, whether you're a band or a writer, when you put out a record or a book and the fans start pulling it through.

There's an eternal debate among Aerosmith fans: *Toys In The Attic* or *Rocks* – which is the best album?
Toys was the first time we went in the studio without a whole album's worth of songs. We had to write some in the studio. [Producer] Jack Douglas said: "We need one more rocker." And I sat on an amp and just started playing a riff. It was the riff to the song *Toys In The Attic*. That was the album where it felt like were getting some command of the studio.

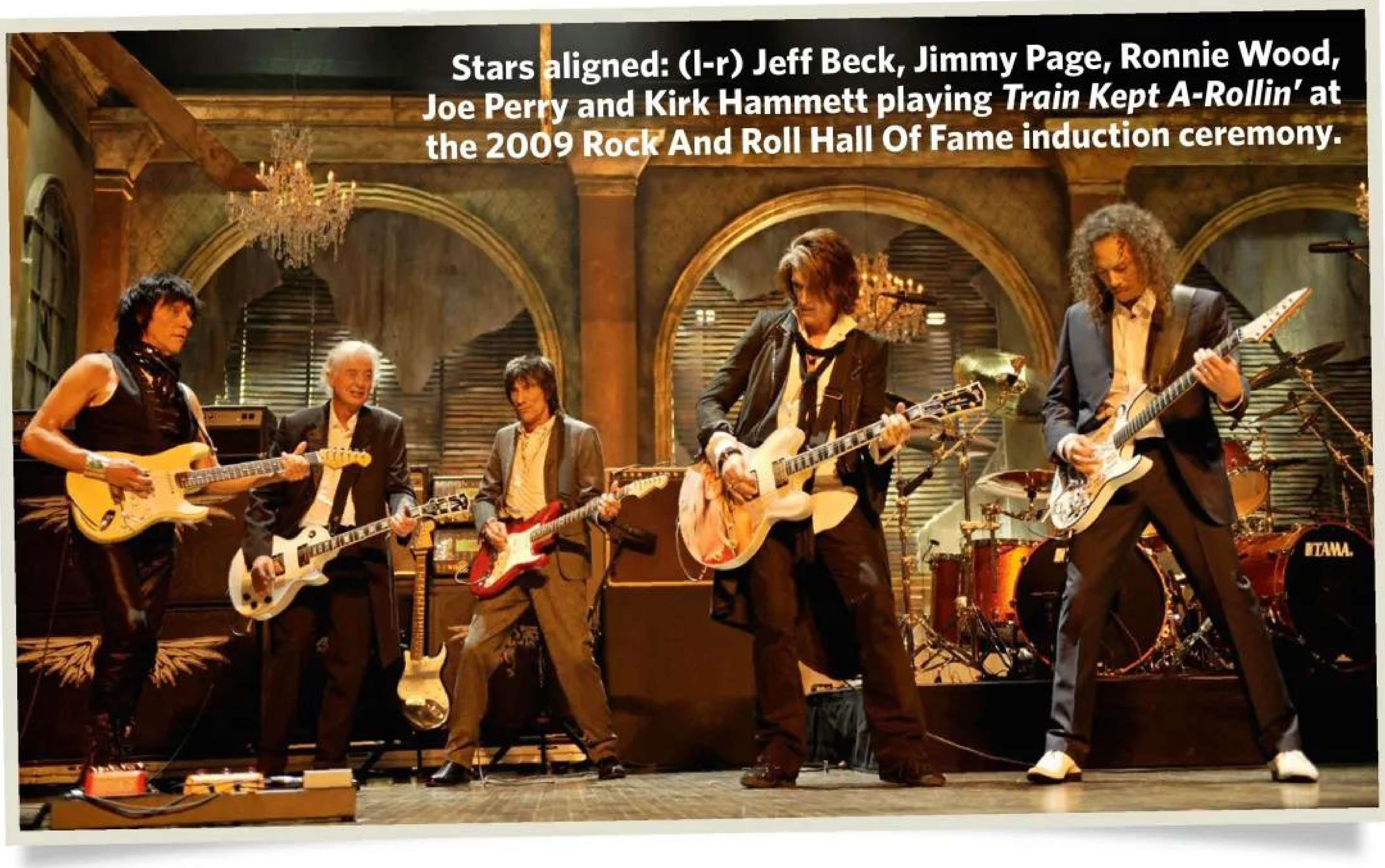
With *Rocks* we had more confidence. We still had to write stuff on the spot, but that was the one where we had more of a handle on the creativity. Not to say that the pressure wasn't on. We were touring constantly, we only took time off to go in the studio. No one said: "Take a month off, go write some songs." It was like: "Go in the studio with whatever ideas you have." That was how it was. *Toys* was kind of the softball album, and *Rocks* was the one were we felt: "Wow, we're there."

Sure. But which of those two albums is best?
[Laughs] Okay, *Rocks* seems like a more direct album. *Toys*, there are some high points on it, but I'd rather listen to *Rocks*.

You were really living up to your Toxic Twins nickname at that point. The drugs seemed to be working for you. Were they a creative aid, or did they give you confidence?
I think they did. The first time you do it, it's like: "Oh, I've never felt like that, I feel like picking up my guitar…" In the early stages of whatever drug your drug of choice is, it's a short cut to that subconscious part of you that has music or whatever talent in there that you want to access.

So when I was young, I looked at drugs as a short cut. I think there were times that they facilitated that. But that stuff, those songs, they were in there. They were going to come out one way or the other. There was a period when we were stone-cold sober for years, and we wrote some of the best stuff we'd done.

When was the point where you realised the drugs were getting in the way?
Everyone in the band arrived at that place at different times.



Stars aligned: (l-r) Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Ronnie Wood, Joe Perry and Kirk Hammett playing *Train Kept A-Rollin'* at the 2009 Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction ceremony.

ROSS HALFIN x2; TOP RIGHT: GETTY

Stare this way: Steven Tyler, Perry and Run DMC's Joseph 'Run' Simmons and Jason 'Jam Master Jay' Mizell, August 1999.

Blood brothers: Perry and fellow Hollywood Vampires Johnny Depp and Alice Cooper, June 2016.

Sometimes it takes somebody else to tell you that and hold up the mirror. I definitely reached a point where I felt they were getting in the way, but it took a lot of bad decisions and wasted times to get to that point. I remember the first thing I wrote sober, after coming out of the first rehab, was the riff to *Hangman Jury* [on 1987's *Permanent Vacation*]. Like I said, that stuff is in there, it's just a matter of finding that path.

You quit Aerosmith in 1979 after a backstage bust-up between some of the then-wives of the band members. What would have happened if you'd stayed in the band?

If I'd stayed in the band, the same thing would have happened. There would have had to be a dose of reality [for things to change]. I would had to have woken up sober and gone: "I need to take some time off." We were playing stadiums, headlining all these huge shows. We could have taken a vacation, then reassembled and come back together. But we were so used to doing this tour-album-tour-album thing, it drove us into the ground.

The record company and the managers had a vested interest in us just working, working, working, cos there were plenty of bands behind us that were a little younger and a little fresher and ready to step in. Looking at our personalities and predilections for certain things, I think the best thing I could have done was leave at that point and let everything mellow out.

You put out three albums with The Joe Perry Project between 1980 and 1983. The first two, *Let The Music Do The Talking* and *I've Got The Rock'N'Rolls Again*, especially were great. But was it scary being out there on your own?

I really loved it. I just wanted to get out and not have the pressure of doing anything but going out and playing in a band, wherever and whenever. Listen, I missed the Aerosmith thing. My head-to-head bullshit with Steven was just that – it was bullshit. I missed the guys, I loved the guys, but there was so much clutter and so much other stuff that went along with it.

It was really tough. What I suspected – and what I heard from their mouths – was that they said: "We're gonna step on his neck, we're gonna starve him back to Aerosmith." When I first left I thought it didn't matter: "They'll find two guys to replace me and Brad [Whitford, guitarist, who left a few months after Perry]. Steven's the star and they're gonna move on." Obviously it didn't quite happen that way.

But I was out there, just playing, having a good time. I was in a relationship in the 70s [with first wife Elyssa, who Perry divorced in 1982], so I got a chance to go out and run wild in a way that I didn't in those early years. And I realised that it wasn't all it cracked up to be.

You met your second wife, Billie, during that period, when she appeared in the video for your solo single *Black Velvet Pants*.

I was in this band in the seventies that was fucking huge, but when she met me she had no idea. She didn't know what an 'Aerosmith' was, and that's the truth. She was into the underground punk scene in Boston, she didn't have any use for a band with a logo. The first time I took her out to dinner, my credit card came back cut in pieces and she had to pay for it. So it wasn't about money.

The Joe Perry Project was going through another change, and somebody suggested hooking up with Alice Cooper. I went up to his manager's house in upstate New York and we hung out for a week and worked on some songs, then he had to go off and do a movie. That fateful week I also made a few phone calls to talk to Steven. Billie said: "This band [Aerosmith] are so good, why aren't you guys together?" And I went down the list of reasons, and I realised it was just a lot of fucking bullshit. Billie was the one who said: "Why don't you give Steven a call. I don't know why you guys aren't playing together." So I picked up the phone and called Steven. Billie called it as she saw it, and she still does. I lean on her incredibly.

"Johnny and Alice asked me to come in. It's like the ultimate garage band."

***Done With Mirrors* was the comeback album, but it was Aerosmith's collaboration with Run DMC on their version of *Walk This Way* that gave your career a shot in the arm.**

I have to say, it wasn't like we were struggling. I know looking back you can say [*Walk This Way*] was a resurrection, but we were still filling

MAIN: ROSS HALFIN; TOP LEFT: GETTY

Older, wiser and no longer toxic: (l-r) Brad Whitford, Steven Tyler, Joey Kramer, Joe Perry and Tom Hamilton,June 2017.

"At this point I want to tour as much as we can. I want to get out and play to the fans. That's really the focus right now."

arenas. We didn't have anything on the charts, but it didn't matter. We were the underdogs again.

Did you realise how influential and important the new version of *Walk This Way* would be?
I wish I could say we mapped it out: "We're gonna do this thing with rap, we're gonna do this video where we break down the walls, we're gonna crack open the door so black artists can get on MTV." No, it was just about the music. We didn't even know what the video was going to be until we started filming it. As the day went on, we realised just how powerful it could be. Sure enough, it went beyond anybody's expectation.

Aerosmith were as big in the late eighties and early nineties as you had been in the seventies, maybe even bigger. What was different about that second act?
The hardest thing for us was working with outside songwriters. Steven and I had worked so hard together over the years, writing and coming up with tunes. The whole MTV thing and getting on the radio and whatever, it would be nice to say we did it all ourselves, but it was really exciting to let go and hearing these people who grew up listening to Aerosmith in the seventies, what their take on what an Aerosmith song could be. But nothing went out that we didn't filter through our thing. We all did some really creative stuff.

You met Kurt Cobain when he came to an Aerosmith show in Seattle. What did you talk about?
Not much. He was pretty quiet. He just wanted to hang out. He came in the dressing room with Courtney [Love] and kind of just sat around with us. He was a normal guy. When he went off to the bathroom, Courtney – who was very verbal – said: "He loves you guys. He doesn't like anybody, but he loves you guys." I had nothing but respect for the guy. He was an amazing songwriter and performer, and to hear that was great.

Record companies would have you believe that the new generation hated the last generation.

Like Sid Vicious saying about Keith Richards: "I wouldn't cross the street to piss on him if he was on fire." Meanwhile, he's sneaking into Ron Wood's garden house to play Keith's guitar [*Ed's note – it was actually Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones who broke into Woods' house and stole his and Richards' guitars*]. I think I was the only guy in Aerosmith that loved the Sex Pistols. It was like: "What are you listening to that trash for? They can't even play."

I went to see the Foo Fighters a few years ago, they asked me to come and sit in with them. They have a warm-up room where they have all the instruments set up so they can go in and jam. And they knew every Aerosmith song cold. I couldn't believe it, I was embarrassed. They were playing songs that I hadn't played in thirty years. There was no bullshit, they were fans, but being able to play some of those songs and know those riffs off the top of their heads, it was like: "Holy shit!"

Perry guesting with Foo Fighters on *Draw The Line* at Cal Jam in 2017.

There was an eleven-year gap between Aerosmith's last two albums of new material, *Just Push Play* and *Music From Another Dimension*. Was that frustrating for you?
Yeah, it was a lot of time. But you've got to remember that we'd gone from being five of us in an apartment, to growing up and having families and kids and grandkids. There was a lot of: "I want to live life and do other things."

When Steven was doing that TV show [*American Idol*, which Tyler appeared on as a judge for two seasons from 2010], it was like: "Holy shit, we're gonna have to plan the band's career around that." But, god bless him, not everybody gets the chance to do that, so it was: "Go for it, man."

There was a lot going on, so I filled it with writing. That's why I've got seven or eight solo albums. I just wish some of those songs had been… I played most of that stuff to Steven.

But listen, we all had to go off and do our own thing. Not really breaking up, but there was times where everybody

ROSS HALFIN x4

Shake your booty: Perry channels his inner Kiss in 2012.

went off in their own direction. I wish we could have been writing and writing and writing and putting out albums, but it wasn't meant to be.

There were tensions between Steven and the rest of the band. Do you regret doing your dirty laundry in public and putting that stuff out there?
[Laughs] Which part?

The late 2000s. Steven was jamming with Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones from Led Zeppelin, there was *American Idol*, he was talking about focusing on 'Brand Tyler'. You told *Classic Rock* that Aerosmith were "looking for a new singer".
I'm not sure how I feel about that. They say all press is good press, but I'm not sure I agree with that. Maybe it felt like we had to say something to our fans. Fuck, I couldn't tell you. We were so spread apart, I don't know. Maybe we were trying to set the record straight and be a little bit more honest and let people know what was going on. I don't know.

How are you two getting on these days?
This is no bullshit, man, he's probably my best friend through all of it. We just know we're different people. Even through the seventies, we were the ones that would go off on a scuba diving trip together. In the eighties and nineties, Billie and I bought a bus so we could go out and have our kids and bring a dog with us. I remember we went out to the desert in Las Vegas with Steven. They had this truck on the big, flat desert, with a parachute thing, and we all took turns going up in this thing.

You and Billie have been together for forty years. Is it fair to say that you might not still be here today without her?
That's more than fair to say. I have no doubt in my mind, I would not be here without my partner in life. Like I said, she didn't know anything about Aerosmith, that was one of the things about her, so obviously there was something there beyond money and fame. We've been through a lot of tough times and a lot more great times. And she's really sharp when it comes to the business stuff. I can take a guitar apart and put it back together, but when it comes to looking at a spreadsheet, I ain't got it.

You've been splitting your time between Aerosmith and the Hollywood Vampires in recent years. Was it always the plan to make the Vampires a long-term thing?
We always thought of it as one-off. It was just to pay respects to the original Hollywood Vampires [the 70s celebrity drinking posse that Alice Cooper was part of] and all the people that had passed away, which was most of them. Johnny and Alice got to be friends, and they asked me to come in – I was up there at Johnny's place. The bigger plan was to work on a solo album, but a bunch of other stuff got in the way.

Then we started talking: "What do you think about going on the road?" It's a bunch of friends who want to hang out, except now they're hanging out on stage and playing these songs. It's like the ultimate garage band.

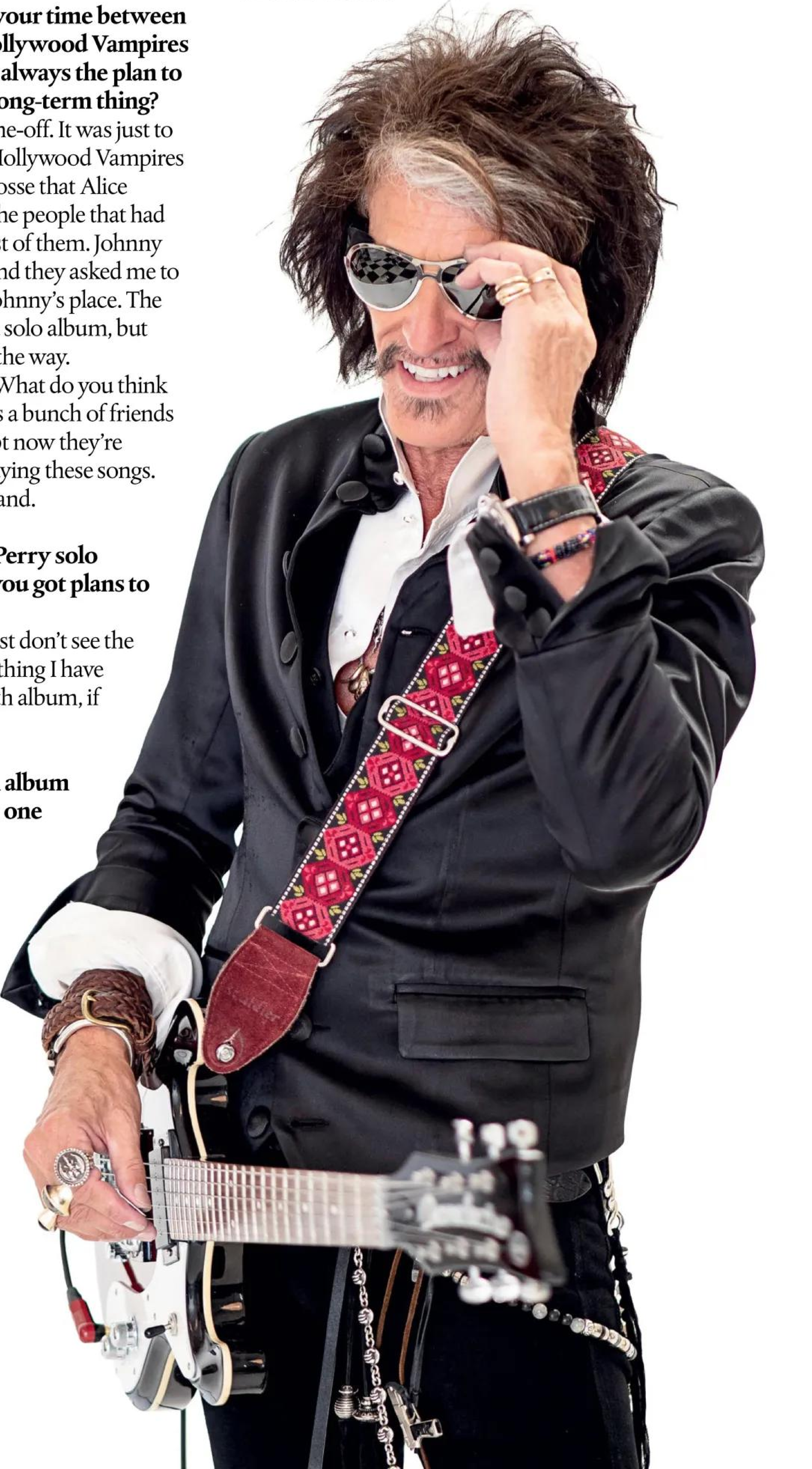
You've released three Joe Perry solo albums since 2005. Have you got plans to make any more?
Not right at the moment. I just don't see the time for it. I would put everything I have into doing another Aerosmith album, if that's even on the cards.

And is another Aerosmith album on the cards? Do you have one more record in you?
I don't know. At this point I want to tour as much as we can. I want to get out and play to the fans. That's really the focus right now, to get out and play live. If we get time to work on some new music, that would be great, but knowing Steven and knowing our age and what it takes to do an album… I don't know. I'm always playing, I'm always writing stuff, but at this stage I can't say. I just want to get through this next tour and play live and give something back to the fans.

We've never been the kind of band that you can sit back and go: "Well, this is what the next three years are gonna be like, this is what our next five years are going to be like." Especially now, at our age. The air is getting thin up here, man. So many people are passing on into the next step, so to speak.

Last question. Who is America's greatest rock'n'roll band: Aerosmith or Kiss?
[Laughing] Oh, I don't know, man. Kiss took performance art to the next level. I remember seeing them for the first time, and I was just fucking blown away. Those guys were the best. We were fretting about not making a mistake, and they didn't give a shit, they just put it out there. Those guys were killing it. I saw their show and thought: "What the fuck do we have to do?" I love Kiss. Kiss and Aerosmith, we're two different entities.

"I would put everything I have into doing another Aerosmith album, if that's even on the cards."



MEN FOR ALL SEASONS

Stranger things: in their 40-plus years **Metallica** have gone from being a cult metal band to a commercial juggernaut and a household name. But even with celebrated new album *72 Seasons* they're still angry, still insecure.

Words: **Paul Rees** Photos: **Tim Saccenti**

A blue-skied mid-morning in Lisbon. It's Carnival Tuesday, February 21, in the Portuguese capital and a national holiday across the country. A marching band are already striking up an imploring samba rhythm from the grand riverfront plaza, the Praca do Comercio. Lines of Mardi Gras revellers in brightly coloured costumes snake along the length of the Rua Serpa Pinto. This vaulting thoroughfare spears off the from the plaza and up the steep hill leading to the skeletal remains of the Convento do Carmo, its Gothic pillars and arches looming over the city like the carcass of a great, gutted whale.

There's a crowd gathered at the head of the road, in the shadow of the ruined convent. In their midst a solitary musician, a busker, is picking out a weeping melody on a battered acoustic guitar. The song is better suited to the dead of a long, dark night than a street party, and at once familiar as being *Nothing Else Matters*. Such is Metallica's enduring ubiquity in this, their forty-second year. Their sheer staying power is remarkable. It's approaching 32 years since *Nothing Else Matters*'s parent record, *Metallica*, aka the

"We were four super-angry, insecure, frustrated kids. Nothing's really changed in terms of our emotional makeup."

Kirk Hammett

Black album, roared out. More than six since Metallica last released an album of new music.

Not that the band have ever truly gone away. Last summer they played shows – festival headliners and their own stadium dates – in a handful of European cities, including Lisbon. These were trailblazers for November's clarion-call single *Lux Aeterna*. Two more new songs – *Screaming Suicide* and *If Darkness Had A Son* – have followed already this year. They are precursors to the release this month of *72 Seasons*, the first Metallica studio album since *Hardwired… To Self-Destruct* back in 2016. What's more,

> **"We're more respectful of each other these days. There's less 'F**k you', and more of the 'Let's try it your way.'"**
>
> **Lars Ulrich**

this rush of activity has chimed with the band attaining a level of hipness without precedent in all the rest of their 125-million-records-sold-and-counting time together.

Put another way, Metallica are riding the wave of the *Stranger Things* effect. More accurately, the grandstanding moment in season four's finale episode when Hellfire Club metalhead Eddie Munson cranked out *Master Of Puppets* from the roof of his trailer in the Upside Down. It was, in fact, Metallica bassist Robert Trujillo's 18-year-old son, Tye, playing the re-recorded riff (the young Trujillo's third-grade teacher happens to be married to one of the show's producers). Tye Trujillo recorded his part at a tiny studio in Venice Beach, unbeknown at the time to James Hetfield, Lars Ulrich and Kirk Hammett. Since the *Stranger Things* episode aired last July, the original Metallica track has had more than half a billion streams on Spotify. The band were also the subject of a weighty profile piece in august, scholarly American magazine *The New Yorker* (among its other recent, and more typical, profile subjects are Salman Rushdie, American-Iranian conceptual artist Tala Madani, and Swiss explorer Bertrand Piccard).

On another mid-February morning, Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammett and Rob Trujillo are at their homes in, respectively, San Francisco, Honolulu, and Topanga Canyon – a hop to the west of Los Angeles. It's seasonably mild in California and, reports Hammett, raining sideways in Hawaii. Each of them, Ulrich especially, is in relaxed but expansive mood. As well they might be. The three new songs have been met with an overwhelmingly positive response from the Metallica faithful. Their combined crackle of electric energy and urgent intent ramped up by the videos accompanying them – slickly stylised, attention-grabbing clips, the work of New York-based photographer/filmmaker Tim Saccenti, who also counts Depeche Mode and Coldplay as clients. Everything in Metallica world just now has the look of being in ship-shape working order, a well-oiled machine.

In the past few weeks, Ulrich has set himself to taking stock of *72 Seasons* as a whole, complete piece. He's been listening to it most often while looking out of the window of a moving car, and also whenever he's working out at home. He likes the songs, he says, adding the caveat: "I haven't quite figured anything more out, to be honest.

"I'm preparing myself for the barrage of different opinions," he continues. "And no opinion is not worthy! When you haven't shared any new music for six years, it's nice just to press the button and get it out of the house, so to speak. It's an exciting time."

In the manner of its beginning, at least, *72 Seasons* took shape like no other Metallica record. By Ulrich's estimate, the band officially started work on it during the late summer of 2020, and when still in the teeth of the covid pandemic. Self-isolating at home, they communicated with each other via Zoom meetings.

Up to then, Ulrich says he'd passed the various lockdown periods "hobbling along trying to figure out whether I should binge-watch forty episodes of *The Crown* this week". Hammett "played guitar and increased my meditation time considerably. What else was I going to do? Oh yeah, and I made a solo record (last year's *Portals* EP). I forgot that part." Trujillo taught himself to cook (speciality dish: Mexican enchiladas with a secret sauce). In general, Ulrich considers, the experience was "a complete mind-fuck".

The band's actual nuts-and-bolts processes survived the ordeal intact. Their starting point was their usual one: Ulrich sifting through the piles of accumulated recordings made variously at rehearsal-room jam sessions and sound-checks, in hotel rooms and during backstage warm-ups over the years intervening *Hardwired…*, and extracting the bare bones of ideas for the band to develop going forward; a snatch of a riff of here, the hint of a counter-melody there. It was all scrutinised through the lens of the drummer's own five-star rating system: anything deemed four or above worthy of greater attention, the twos and ones consigned to history.

"In Metallica, it's not as if somebody ever picks up an acoustic guitar on a couch and – bam! – there's a song," says Ulrich. "It's many pieces of puzzles and connecting the bits. Then we started

listening to and jamming through the stuff we'd picked out and on our Zoom sessions, sat behind computer screens in our home studios or makeshift music rooms.

"Dealing with how you make music when everything has a two-second delay. I would be playing a drum beat and James putting a riff over it. He could hear my drums, but I couldn't hear his guitar. Or

"We're stubborn, and we don't want to let the music, or the legacy, down."

Kirk Hammett

vice-versa. It wasn't conducive to maintaining your sanity. We were sort of stumbling ahead and with all the uncertainties of calendars, lockdowns and the human condition. For a few months there we moved forward very, very slowly. Progress was glacial."

When eventually they were able to convene again at the band's home base, HQ – their sprawling studio-come-rehearsal facility in San Rafael, a 30-minute drive from San Francisco, where every Metallica album since the ill-fated *St. Anger* has gone down – it was in the 'new normal' state of things. Which is to say with everyone having to take covid tests every morning and maintain a safe distance from each other in the studio.

Joining them at HQ was Greg Fidelman, a team fixture ever since he'd been Rick Rubin's right-hand man on 2008's *Death Magnetic* album, and having then stepped up to helm *Hardwired*… The sessions were interrupted once more with the band breaking off to honour touring commitments in North and South America and Europe, held over from the pandemic, but otherwise, say the principals, proceeded relatively hitch-free. 'Civilised' is the word Ulrich chooses to describe the pervading atmosphere.

"The difference these days is we're maybe more respectful of each other," he says. "We listen more to each other. There's less of the 'Fuck you', and more of 'That sounds interesting, let's try it your way.'"

"When we were working by Zoom, a lot of that weird energy and chemistry was dissipated," says Hammett. "It was there still, but not as strong. So many of the great things that happen with us as a band are the result of the four us being together in the room. Coming up with ideas is not really a challenge. Between the four of us we have so many fucking great ideas."

Still, from outset to finish, *72 Seasons* gobbled up two years. Debut album *Kill 'Em All* was done and dusted in not much more than a couple of weeks of May '83.

"As you get older, the good thing is you have more experience, and the bad is it affords you more options," says Ulrich. "The more options, the longer things ⊳

Men for all *Seasons*: Lars Ulrich (left) and Kirk Hammett.

'New boy' Robert Trujillo: Metallica's bassist since 2003.

of Hetfield's well-documented disappearance to rehab and the ensuing turmoil when hapless 'life counsellor' Phil Towle was engaged to try to fix their fracturing intra-band relationships. The whole mess of it was preserved for posterity in 2004's infamous *Some Kind Of Monster*, an act of shared self-flagellation masquerading as a making-of documentary film.

Coming after *St. Anger*, *Death Magnetic* – all too accurately reappraised in *The New Yorker* as "a record with all the defeated energy of a sinking stone" – couldn't help but constitute a rebirth of sorts, and despite the fact that its songs sounded so wrenched out. *Hardwired…* was stronger yet, a re-flexing of muscles and with a renewed sense of purpose. It's the Metallica record Ulrich is drawn back to the most – "The one with the longest shelf life for me," he says. "Or, from a different position, the one I find the fewest faults with."

72 Seasons ups the ante. Clocking in at a hefty 12 songs/77 minutes, it ranges across four sides of vinyl. It does the same chrome-plated renovation job on the core elements of the classic mid-to-late-80s Metallica sound – the chugga-chugga riffs, Ulrich's volleying drums, Hammett's wah-wah-ing solos, Hetfield's anguished howl – as its two immediate predecessors, but better. Thrilling even at its peak points, and in sum dense, complex and relentless.

On the one hand it's precision designed to super-serve the diehard Metallica fan. Equally, though, it will delight anyone lured in by the *Stranger Things* turn. Although, just as much as *Master Of Puppets*, it echoes its much less cherished follow-up, *…And Justice For All*, albeit with Trujillo's bass being audible. *72 Seasons*, too, is a record made up of great parts. The opening, Stuka-bomb-run screech of *Lux Aeterna*, for example. Or the corkscrewing lurches of *Crown Of Barbed Wire*. Or the rat-a-tat breakdown of closing track *Inamortal*, an 11-plus-minute epic.

Urich takes the *…Justice…* comparison as a compliment, but insists: "We tend not to reference the past all that much when we're being creative. It's not so much part of an MO, or master plan, as I think perhaps other people perceive it to be." Hammett's appraisal of the new album is more concise. "I just love the fact it doesn't have a ballad on it," he enthuses. "No freaking ballads!"

"The biggest objective for us is trying to be truthful to the moment," Ulrich continues. "Obviously, when you've been on a creative journey for north of forty years there are twists and turns, ups and downs. On the back of the Black album, something that resonated to such a magnitude, one of the battle cries became: 'Let's not repeat it!' Thirty years later, you've enough clarity to be able to have a conversation about whether you went too far, too much into uncharted waters.

"What happens is you're in your wheelhouse and reach a point where you feel it's too confining, so you break out. After you've gone off somewhere else for a while, it's interesting, but you end up missing your original wheelhouse. You go back to where you came from. That's the path we've been on, constantly looking for something."

take because you feel this inherent need to go over every one of them. You can spend a day trying to weed nine options down to one or two. And of course there's a part of you romanticising how when you were twenty-two you did it instinctively, without having to fucking think about it."

Ulrich and Hetfield both turn 60 this year. Hammett reached that milestone in November last year. Together, and separately, and ever since the Black album rampaged its way into the global consciousness, the three of them have serially appeared to be grappling with the question of exactly what Metallica should be. And also how best – and if at all – they should go on being Metallica. With Jason Newsted on bass through the *Load*/*Reload* era of haircuts, eyeliner, arty videos and album covers made up of blood and semen. Then with Newsted's successor Trujillo, a sprightly 59 this October, on board from *St. Anger* onwards.

Trujillo recalls his initiation into the band as "a wild ride – a roller-coaster". Small wonder, given that he arrived in the wake

"I ask myself the question, who is James to me? He can be a bit of a mystery.

Robert Trujillo

He's not so quick to answer the question of what exactly has made it possible for Metallica to have endured, so indomitably, indestructibly, into their fifth decade. Atypically, he falls silent. The pregnant pause lasts for 13 seconds before he at last begins to concoct an answer.

"I guess…" Another pause, this one of four seconds. "…We love what we do, and we love each other. We love how it connects us to other people enough to persevere through all the shit that has come in the way.

"When one of us went missing, in the mental and spiritual sense, there was

"I feel like all of my best years are still going to be ahead of me, except they might not be."

Lars Ulrich

always enough there to pull him back into the fray. We've always gone with the option of sticking it out and finding ways to keep going over severing our ties. Severing would often have been the easier thing to do, but we've been prepared to put in the time, work and resources to keep this functioning."

Hammett answers the same question right off the cuff: "Because we're stubborn, every single one of us, and we don't want to let the music, or the legacy, down. It's too precious and unique to give up. We might not be getting along for six months, but that's enough motivation for anyone to show up."

The new album's title is Hetfield's, and a reference to the first 18 years of a person's life. Those moulding, formative years from childhood into young adulthood. Eighteen also happens to be the age at which Hetfield and Ulrich first met. Theirs is an oft-told tale. The former responded to a small ad the latter had placed in a local Bay Area free sheet *The Recycler*: "Drummer looking for other metal musicians to jam with – Tygers of Pan Tang, Diamond Head, Iron Maiden."

They were, to be sure, an odd couple. Hetfield, raised in the Los Angeles County city of Downey by devout Christian Scientist parents. His World War II vet father, Virgil, walking out on the family when he was 13. Three years later, losing his mother, Cynthia, to cancer, and after she had refused any medical treatment on religious grounds. To Ulrich, the teenaged Hetfield seemed cripplingly shy, entirely out of step with the world around him.

On his side, Ulrich's father, Torben, a jazz critic and one-time tennis pro, had moved his only son from their native Denmark to the US when he was 15. He was enrolled as a prodigy at the storied Nick Bolletieri Tennis Academy in South Florida. Afterwards, father and son ▷

James Hetfield: "Still capable of blowing my mind with his gift," says Lars Ulrich.

Cliff 'em all: (l-r) James Hetfield, Lars Ulrich, Cliff Burton, Kirk Hammett.

168 SEASONS

Kirk Hammett provides some snapshots from Metallica's 42-year odyssey.

May 1983: Metallica relocate to a near-derelict rehearsal space in Queens, New York to make their debut album, *Kill 'Em All*.

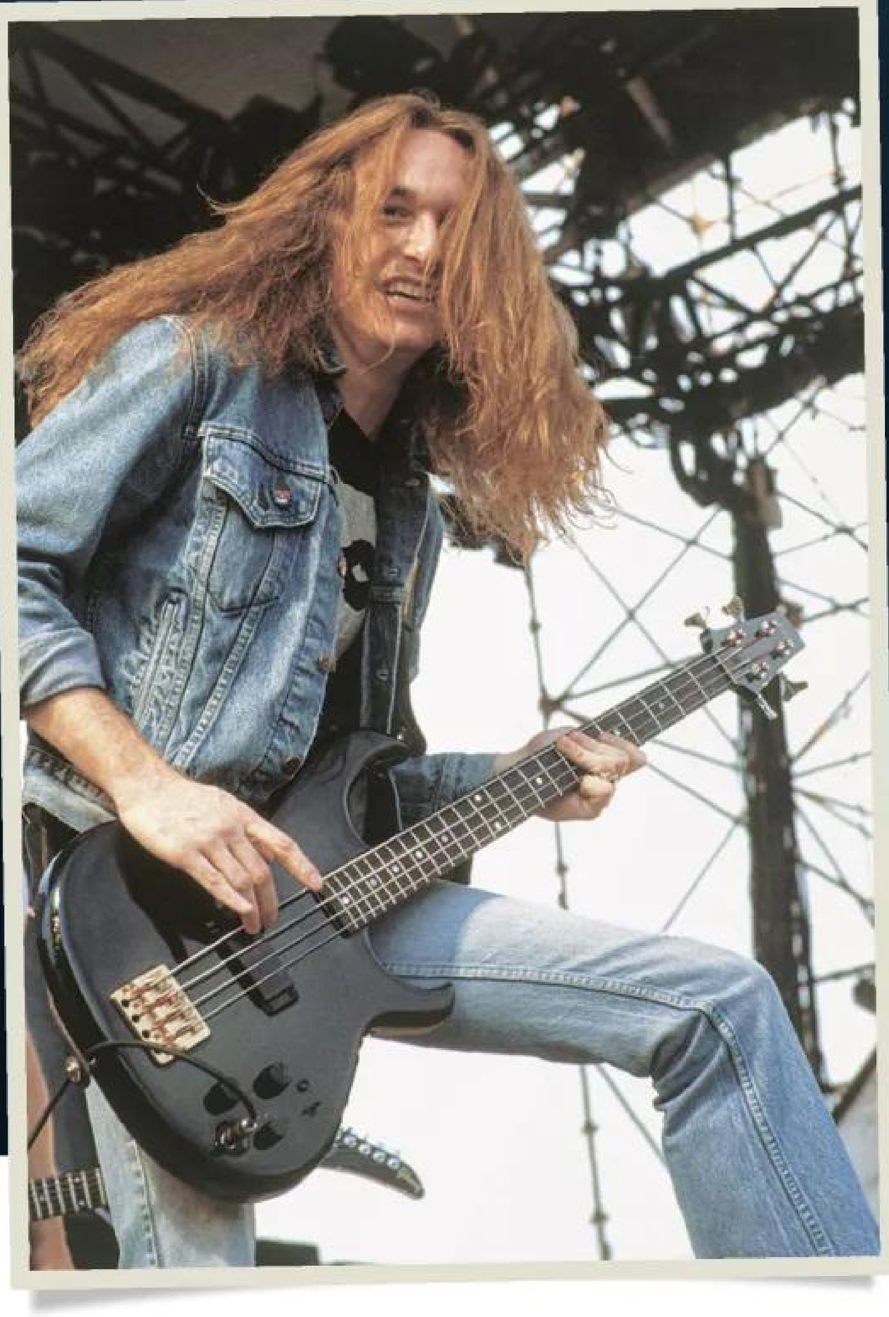
"Snow outside the window. The glass in the window was broken, too. We were up on the fifth floor of the building. I had a piece of foam on the floor for a mattress, with my sleeping bag laid out on top of it and my leather jacket for a pillow. I was set up right next to Cliff and he was reading a dungeons and dragons book, *The Call Of Cthulhu*."

September-December 1985: recording *Master Of Puppets* at Sweet Silence studio in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"Cliff and I playing poker for matchsticks, waiting for Lars to finish the drums. Having a running commentary on anything and everything in life, laughing and drinking powerful Elephant beer pretty much twenty-four hours a day."

February 10, 1962 - September 27, 1986: Cliff Burton, RIP

"I used to room with Cliff (right), and we were in each other's back pockets. We were brothers for three years. Before the term 'foodie' was even around, Cliff was a foodie. He was so into Mexican food, sushi, and breakfast, his favourite meal of the day. He was always talking about food. The guy ate tons of food. He'd drink copious amounts of beer as well. I don't know where it went. We used to call him Pencil Legs. Cliff loved life, and he lived it to the full. He didn't waste any of his time. If he wasn't playing music, he was finding other things to do that made him happy. He spent very little time complaining. When he left us he was just as powerful as he could be as a person. He never waned."



August 8, 1992: the notorious riot at the Olympic Stadium in Montreal during the ill-starred co-headline tour with Guns N'Roses. Metallica are forced to curtail their set when James Hetfield is burnt by pyro. Axl Rose also brings GN'R's set to a premature conclusion. Mayhem ensues.

"That whole tour was marred by controversy, and it came to a head when James had his accident. I remember being trapped in our subterranean dressing room at the stadium and our tour manager telling us it was too dangerous for us to leave. They'd turned over two cop cars and burned another vehicle outside of the venue. It felt like fucking Armageddon for a moment. It was unbelievable we'd found ourselves in the centre of that situation. Up to then we'd avoided anything like it like the plague."

January 24, 2004: the premiere of Joel Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's fly-on-the-wall documentary film *Some Kind Of Monster* at the Sundance festival.

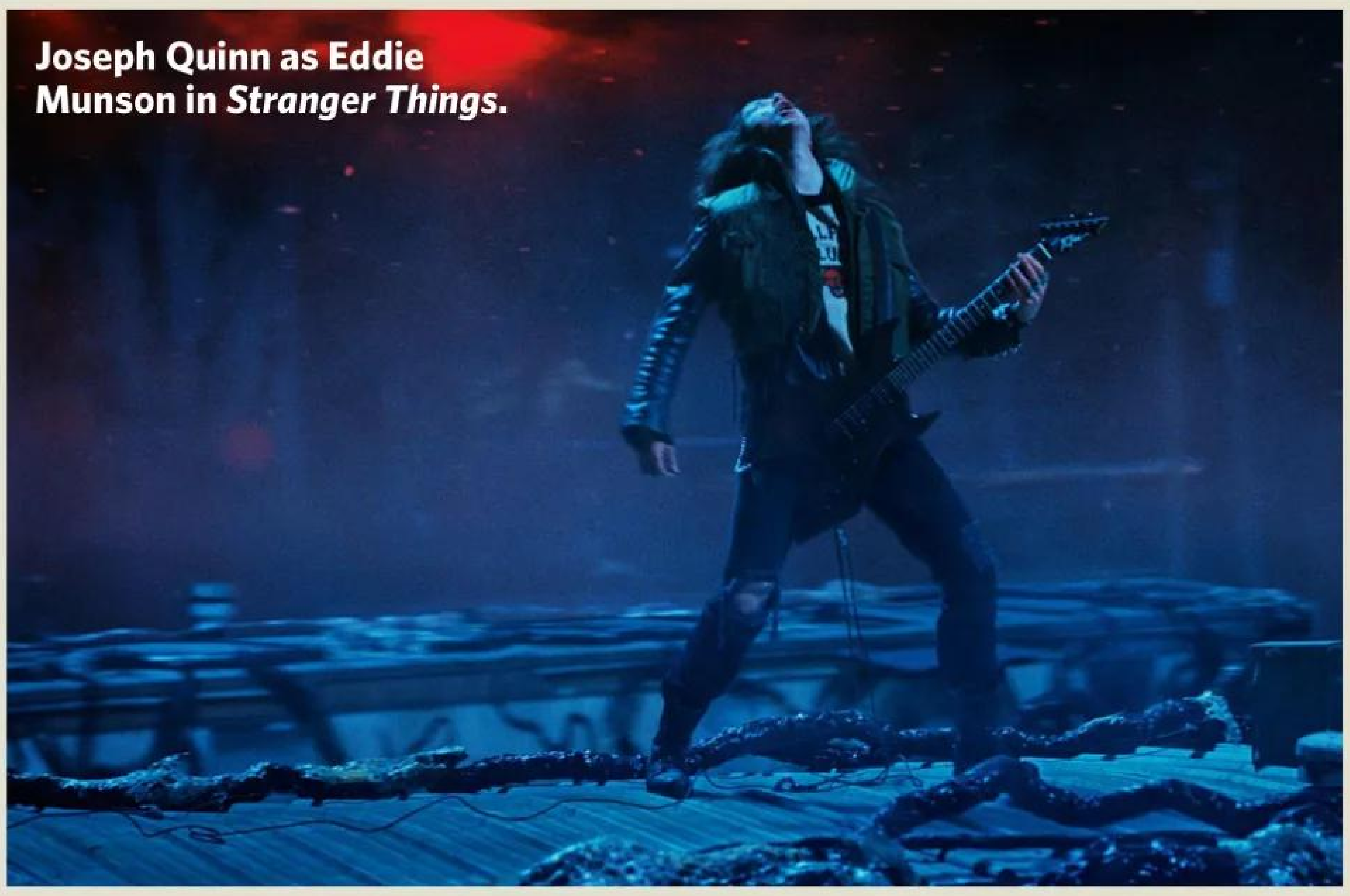
"I have my own problems with *Some Kind Of Monster*. I just think it showed too much. I've made my peace with it, because I've had so many people come up to me and tell me how much it's meant to them. If it's helping people with their own problems, great, but I tend not to give it too much of my attention. I lived it, why should I fucking watch it?"

Hetfield's arm and hand were burned in a pyro accident at a show in Montreal on August 8, 1992.

Metallica with 'life counsellor' Phil Towle, who in the early 2000s was engaged to try to fix their fracturing intra-band relationships.

July 1, 2022: the fourth-season finale of *Stranger Things* airs. Eddie Munson unleashes *Master Of Puppets* on the Upside Down.

"I still haven't watched the fourth season yet! I've watched the *Master Of Puppets* sequence though. For me, it just shows you the power of the riff. Those riffs are so fucking commanding, and they have so much frigging authority. It used to be you could pick a Metallica fan out of a line-up of a hundred people: the kid with the denim or leather jacket. Jump ahead forty-plus years and I don't know who's a Metallica fan these days. I'll go on Instagram and see this nine-year-old girl from India playing a bunch of our songs on guitar. It's amazing."



Joseph Quinn as Eddie Munson in *Stranger Things*.

ROSS HALFIN x3; STRANGER THINGS: COURTESY OF NETFLIX
SOME KIND OF MONSTER: ANNAMARIA DISANTO/RADICAL MEDIA

settled in another LA satellite city, Newport Beach, by which time Lars had ditched tennis for music.

"At eighteen I was very narrow-minded, very inexperienced, but very focused on my purpose," he says. "That was to make music and to try to connect with other people who were disenfranchised, or outcasts. Hard rock fanatics like me. My outlook was very singular.

"James was the brother I never had. Starting out together, we both found solace in each other. We were so different from each other, but somehow the combination of the two of us became a whole. We filled a void in each other. The songs we were writing then, the shows we were playing, the path we were on was very constricted. Nowadays – and I talk with my two sons about this – what I see with a lot of younger people is that their path is so much wider. Their possibilities are much broader. My trajectory was very different."

Hammett, who joined in 1983 as the 20-year-old replacement for departing powder keg Dave Mustaine, adds: "As a quick insight, James is a very shy person and bashful. I'm shy and bashful. Lars is shy and not so bashful. That's the band dynamic and it all started from there. Before we were even Metallica we were four super-angry, insecure, frustrated kids who just had passion and a lot of musical energy needing to be unleashed. Nothing's really changed in terms of our emotional make-up. We're survivors as far as I'm concerned."

"When one of us went missing, in the mental and spiritual sense, there was always enough there to pull him back."

Lars Ulrich

Hetfield has declined to do interviews with the rock press for *72 Seasons*. In many ways the album does his talking for him. His lyrics for it weigh up the damages inflicted on a troubled son growing up. They navigate almost biblical degrees of torment and inner conflict, as unyielding as scripture. On the dread-filled title track, he rails of '*staring into black light, permanently midnight*'. On *Crown Of Barbed Wire* of '*this rusted empire I own*'. *Too Far Gone* finds him citing a litany of miseries: '*Crawling out my skin… I am desperation… I am isolation… I am agitation.*'

Back in September of 2019, Hetfield again checked himself into rehab, for treatment for his alcoholism. Later he stated he'd struggled with being on tour with the band and had not been "caring for myself". Last summer, and with Metallica returned to the road, he was widely reported to have filed for divorce from Francesca Tomasi, his wife of 25 years and mother to their three children. He remains a study in contrasts: the imperious, unbending frontman waging war with his demons; enigmatic, tormented and unknowable, and perhaps at times as much to his own bandmates as to anyone else.

"I ask myself the question: 'Who is James to me?'" says Trujillo. "I feel he's someone who wants to show strength and be that individual that commandeers the ship, but there's always going to be a battle with James. He can be a real, true brother and stand up for you, appreciate you. Then at other times he can get withdrawn, quiet and subdued. He can be a bit of a mystery, but in his heart I think he really strives to be better as a person and as a spiritual being."

"James is my life partner, one of my best friends," says Ulrich. "He's someone I love and respect deeply. Someone who is still capable of blowing my mind with his gift. I'm maybe more in awe of him as a creative force than I've ever been.

"He's probably the person I know best on this planet. Often when we're talking I'll know what he's going to say before he says it. If we're in a group situation, I'll know how he's going to act before he acts. At the same time, he's also enigmatic to me. He's all of it and more." ▷

Since *St. Anger*, the band have continued to manage their schedule around Hetfield's needs and principally on his terms. They've toured in shorter bursts. As with all compromises, this one appears to have its tension points.

"We're a working band, and I don't feel we play enough shows," says Hammett. "Other people in the band have other priorities, other responsibilities and other things in their lives, so we've had to come to an agreement and find a balance. If it was up to me I'd be touring six months out of every year, easily."

On the heels of *72 Seasons*, Metallica will undertake the M72 world tour. Subtitled 'No Repeat Weekend', it's 46 shows in 23 cities and other locations, with the band geared up to play completely different sets on each consecutive night. Kicking off in Amsterdam on April 27 and 28 and running through to late September in Mexico City, the itinerary takes in both Thursday and Sunday night headliner slots at the Download festival, the event having been extended to four days to accommodate Metallica's concept.

As an exercise, the tour is entirely in keeping with more recent band projects such as *The Metallica Blacklist*, the 2021 covers collection to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Black album. That brought the disparate likes of Phoebe Bridgers, Miley Cyrus with Elton John, Dave Gahan of Depeche Mode, country superstar Chris Stapleton (all of whom took a crack at *Nothing Else Matters*), St. Vincent, Royal Blood and Jason Isbell (each rendering a version of *Sad but True*) into the Metallica tent. In the most basic sense, both it and No Repeat Weekend have the ring of ideas conjured up as means of keeping things fresh and interesting for Metallica themselves first and foremost.

"It's that same juxtaposition I talked about earlier, wanting to keep doing what's familiar but at the same time to reinvent the wheel," says Ulrich. "One of the biggest blessings of being in this band is we've carved out a way to be able to do both. In terms of our creativity, it still feels like we're only scratching the surface, as though we have licence to cover a lot more territory."

Then again, there is the matter of encroaching age and time's noose. Of one's own mortality and wanting to get things done before it's too late. What Bruce Springsteen, when he was nearing 60, once described as the growing, pressing feeling of having to run hard and fast in a bid to stay ahead of the freight train rushing up the tracks behind him.

For Metallica it's still all about their music and their legacy. Nothing else matters.

"I'm starting to see that, at least a little bit," Ulrich says, laughing. "Absolutely, with Metallica there's a sense of: 'Hurry up and get on with it,' because we may not have as much time as we once thought. Through a significant part of your life, you're going: 'I have more ahead of me than behind me.' Then you wake up one day and go: 'Holy shit, I may have more behind me!'

"There's a part of me that still feels very youthful and almost awkwardly young. Then there's the other part that feels as if I've been doing this for a hundred years. Yes I'm going to be sixty soon, but I feel like all my best years are still going to be ahead of me, except they might not be. I like being productive. My dad, who's ninety-four now, is writing every day and he has volumes of books still in his head. I know what's keeping him alive is the fact he's writing these books."

> **"We tend not to reference the past all that much when we're being creative."**
> **Lars Ulrich**

"For me," says Hammett, "the future doesn't even exist yet so I'm not going to spend my time here worrying about it. What is meant to be will be. Less thinking, more being in the moment. And what's next for me right now is I'm going for a thirty-minute swim."

Before Ulrich, too, heads back off into his day, he stresses that he isn't "a big regret kind of guy". He wouldn't be minded to going back in time to change, or unpick, any aspect of Metallica's long and winding road from then to now, he avows, even if he could.

"I don't spend a lot of time thinking on those kinds of things," he says. "The bus accident, of course I regret, and other dark, black things. But I'd rather try and make a better job of tomorrow than fix something from yesterday. Were some of the haircuts and wardrobe choices better than others? Yes. Did I open my big mouth and say a bunch of stupid shit? Absolutely. Hey, you do the best you can along the way, you know?"

72 Seasons is out now via Blackened Recordings.

The Soundtrack Of My Life

Skindred frontman ***Benji Webbe***, on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Will Simpson**

JOHNNY ROTTEN: GETTY

Years before nu metal ate the world, Benji Webbe was melding hip-hop, metal, punk and reggae into a startlingly original concoction, first in the sorely underrated Dub War and then in the more successful Skindred. During their quarter-century together the latter have released seven albums (an eighth, *Smile*, is out now), forged a global reputation as a ferocious live act and carved out a niche that is uniquely theirs.

Certainly, few figures who have featured on this page have claimed influences as diverse as the Sex Pistols, Nat King Cole and Aswad. Oh, and *The Banana Splits*.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

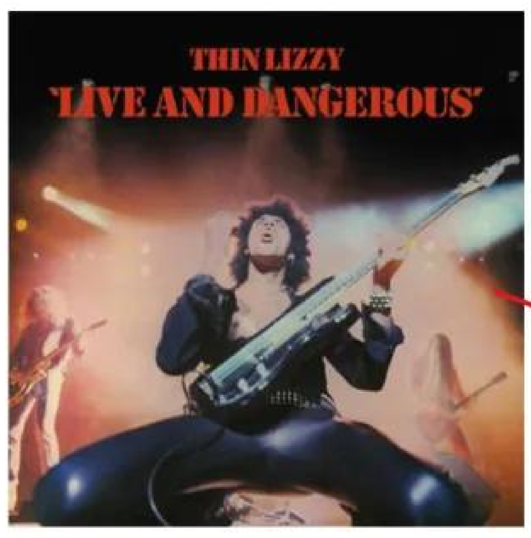
My mum and dad's record collection played a big part in my life. Motown was strong in my household, and Jamaican reggae. Then there was Bowie, T.Rex, Sweet and Slade on the radio – I had a great start when it comes to rock'n'roll.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

There was a corner shop down the road from where we lived. And there was a TV show called *The Banana Splits*; I loved the theme tune. One day I went down to the shop singing the song, and these women who worked in the shop thought it was amazing. So they gave me a bag of sweets for doing it.

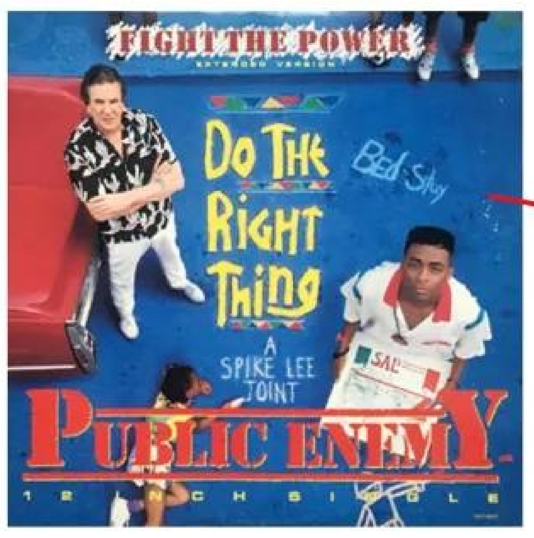
THE SONGWRITER

Burt Bacharach. His songs are absolutely incredible. And it's not just the hits that he had. It's the way that they're used in movies that I saw as a kid growing up, like *Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head* in *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*.



THE GUITAR HERO

Prince is one of the best guitarists. He had everything you'd want in a guitarist; solos that last forever and stay with you like a melody. He's one of my vocal heroes too.



THE SINGER

For nothing more than the silkiness of his voice it's Nat King Cole. Don't get me wrong, I love Brian Johnson, I love Bon Scott, but Nat King Cole is in front of all of them.

THE CULT HERO

Johnny Rotten back when he first started. Just for the things he stood for and the things he said. For a black kid growing up on a council estate in South Wales, Johnny Rotten's words spoke to me. It wasn't just rebelliousness for its own sake, but just to take no shit. I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now had it not been for him.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

The test of a great record is do I let it play it all the way through, or do I skip? One that I always let play is Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*. It's an album that encourages you to strive for better in the world. The musicianship is outstanding.

THE BEST RECORD I'VE MADE

I know it sounds clichéd, but the one we've just made, *Smile*. I think we've hit on something that is going to last a lot longer than the band. With the other records there was a lot of tension, a lot of fighting within the band, but I felt on this record everybody knew what they were doing and there were no weird vibes. Everyone just got on with it. It was one of those albums when it was great to be in Skindred. And I'm sure that when people hear it they'll agree.

THE WORST ALBUM I'VE MADE

The last one, *Big Tings*. I just felt useless as a vocalist. The energy in the band was making me feel as if we were coming to the end of this thing, and everything I did didn't seem good enough. I mean, don't get me wrong, I enjoy a couple of the songs on it, but mostly I just hear the pain in the album.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND OF ALL TIME

There's a band from Liverpool called The Cubical who are absolutely amazing. They should be up there with Oasis and all those alternative rock bands. The singer has a Tom Waits thing to him but he's also a bit of a rock crooner. They're hugely underrated.

BEST LIVE ALBUM

Classic Rock readers might not know it, but Aswad's *Live From Notting Hill Carnival*. For me it's a fantastic live album. And Thin Lizzy's *Live And Dangerous*. It's outrageously beautiful. I was in Dublin the other day and took a walk to see Phil's statue and said thank you.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT PARTY SONG

The one that gets me going is *Fight The Power*, Public Enemy. Great anthem. And *Bring The Noise* too, the Anthrax cover version of it with Chuck D.

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

There's a Skindred song that we've performed for a while called *Saying It Now*. It's about a friend of mine. I went to see him just when I was starting a tour, and he said he'd been diagnosed with cancer and asked whether I'd see him again. I said I definitely would. Then months went past. Eventually I thought I'd call in on him again. I went up to his house, and his wife answered the door and said: "Unfortunately, Benji, Sean died this morning." I went home and wrote this song about the regret you feel from not going to see a friend until it's too late. I can't ever perform it now without crying.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

I'd like a string quartet – four girls in red – playing *God Save The Queen* by the Sex Pistols in a classical style. I think that'd be classy.

"I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now had it not been for Johnny Rotten."

Skindred's new album Smile is out now via Earache Records.

HENRY DILTZ/GETTY

Gold After Gold

His *After The Gold Rush* album made **Neil Young** a star, but it also put him at a fork in the road. Hitting a rich creative seam with the more mellow follow-up, he struck gold again with a classic that remains his finest record: *Harvest*.

Words: **Rob Hughes** Photos: **Joel Bernstein** & **Henry Diltz**

Neil Young and his wife Susan backstage at Electric Factory in Philadelphia, February 1970. The photo was chosen for the gatefold of his *After The Gold Rush* album of that year.

© JOEL BERNSTEIN 1970 / PRESS

The Johnny Cash Show is deep into its second season when Neil Young pulls into Nashville. Lauded for its healthy cross-pollination of styles, freely pitching together a diverse collection of artists, the weekly US TV show has previously attracted big hitters such as Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Roy Orbison, Ray Charles, Loretta Lynn, Louis Armstrong and Eric Clapton.

It's early February 1971, and Young's star is rising fast. Not only has he enjoyed success as a quarter of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, America's foremost supergroup, but also *After The Gold Rush*, his third solo album, is about to go platinum. Plus he's fresh from a sell-out acoustic tour of the States and his native Canada. An appearance on *The Johnny Cash Show*, filmed at the legendary Ryman Auditorium, is already overdue. He's in good company too, sharing a bill with James Taylor, Linda Ronstadt and Tony Joe White.

Introduced by Cash as a "brilliant mind", Young plays two striking new songs: *The Needle And The Damage Done* and *Journey Through The Past*. "It was an opportunity to perform with my peers, but I felt I didn't do as well there as I might have, for whatever reason," the ever self-critical Young wrote in his 2012 memoir *Waging Heavy Peace*. "But something extraordinary came out of this trip."

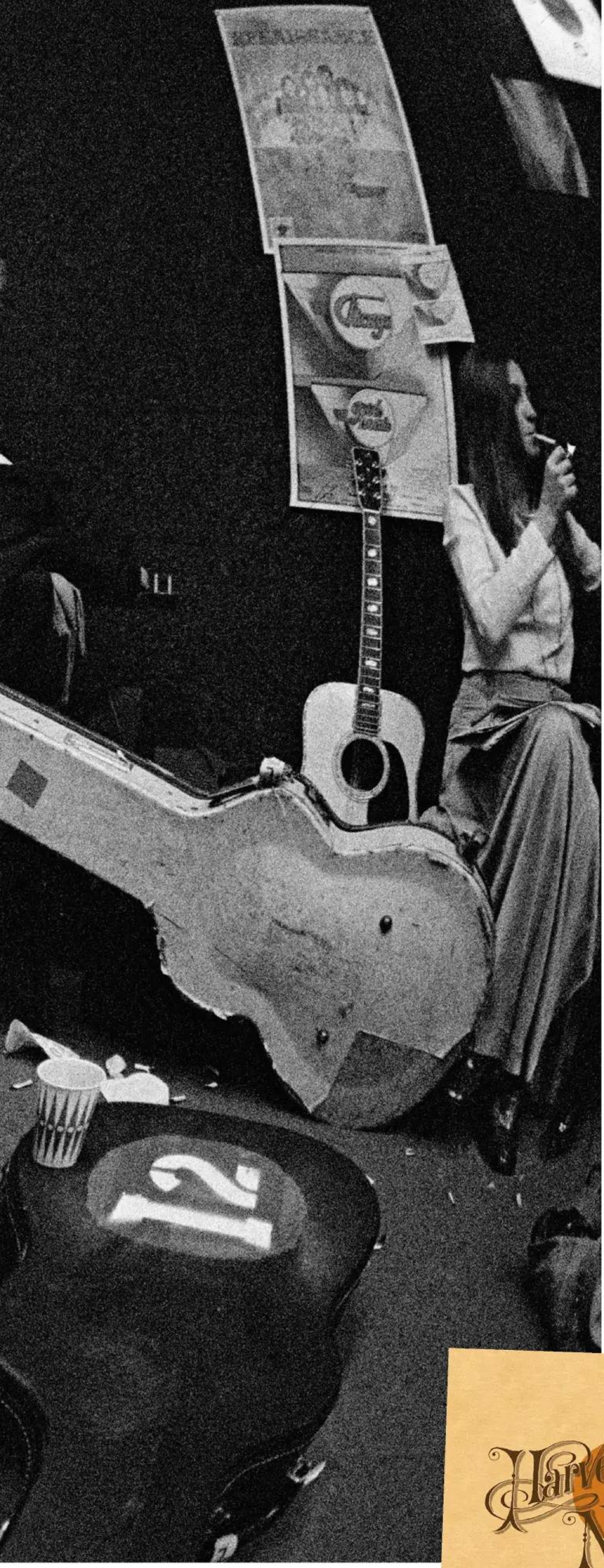
Keen to get down to some recording while in town, Young is introduced to Elliot Mazer, a local producer who also owns Quadrafonic Studios on Music Row. Mazer's first-choice musicians are booked elsewhere that weekend, so he hastily brings in bassist Tim Drummond, drummer Kenny Buttrey and steel guitar player Ben Keith. Young invites Taylor and Ronstadt along too. The impromptu songs they record in Nashville would form the basis of Young's next album, *Harvest*.

"*Heart Of Gold* put me in the middle of the road. Travelling there soon became a bore, so I headed for the ditch."

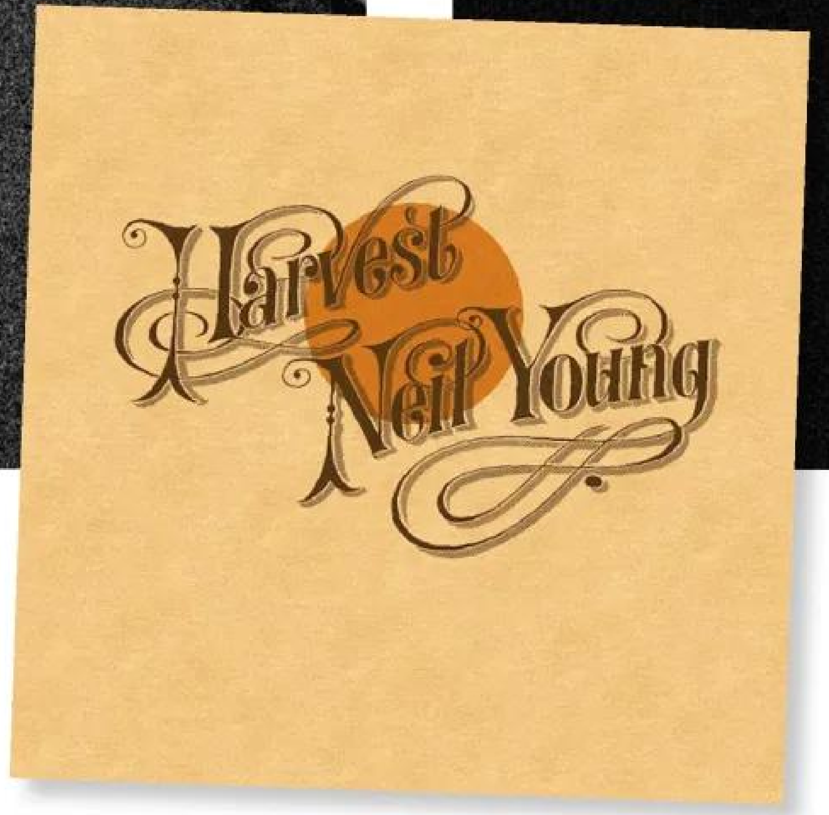
Purely by chance, Young had found his next great band. The instant chemistry he shared with Drummond, Buttrey and Keith – quickly dubbed the Stray Gators by Young – gave *Harvest* its signature charge, placing Young's songs at a porous intersection of folk, country and 70s rock. The Stray Gators would remain by his side for the next two years.

Released in February 1972, *Harvest* became – and remains – the biggest-selling album of Young's career. It was prefaced by a monster hit, *Heart Of Gold*, whose easy-going, lilting melody propelled it to the top of *Billboard*'s singles chart. Young was fêted as a superstar, especially in his adopted America, where marketing forces routinely pegged him as the quintessential 70s singer-songwriter: laid-back, loose, mellow.

Except that Young hated the idea. As he famously remarked in the sleeve notes of his 1977 compilation *Decade*, *Heart Of Gold* (and by extension *Harvest*) "put me in the middle of the road. Travelling there soon became a bore, so I headed



Young at Royce Hall, UCLA, January 30, 1971.



for the ditch. A rougher ride but I saw more interesting people there."

In its own curious way, then, *Harvest* is largely responsible for Young's subsequent journey through the rest of the 70s and beyond – from darker, often conflicted albums like *On The Beach* and *Tonight's The Night*, to the abrasive cultural reckoning of *Rust Never Sleeps*. Yet *Harvest* has not been diminished by age. It is a compelling document of a time and place and the creative forces that shaped it.

Young seems to have fully embraced its legacy in recent years, too. The just-released lovingly curated 50th-anniversary edition comes with a contemporaneous live show filmed by the BBC and a previously unseen two-hour documentary, *Harvest Time*, shot during the album sessions. As Young notes on his Archives site: "For me, everything was new and I was living the dream."

In the documentary, Young, reclining on a patch of grass at Broken Arrow, his 1,000-acre ranch in Northern California, is taking a break from rehearsals with the Stray Gators. He's in philosophical mood as the camera rolls. "This is phases in the wind," he muses, gesturing over to the huge barn, where his new band are busy jamming, the natural echo bouncing off the surrounding hills. "Such a weird time, an incredible time." It's one of several telling moments in *Harvest Time*, filmed over the spring and summer of 1971.

Songs have been poring out of Young at quickening pace. He's marvelling at "a bunch of cats" who seem to have an intuitive grasp of what those songs require in the studio, and, what's more, he's recording in his favourite place: home. He's loved-up, too, with actress Carrie Snodgress, who has recently moved in with him at Broken Arrow. Life is good.

It hadn't always been this way of late. CSNY had fallen apart the previous summer, the result of acrimony that had been festering since the sessions for their second album, *Déjà Vu*, reaching a point of no return on the ensuing tour of the States. Even the success of *After The Gold Rush*, released in August 1970, had been tempered by the dissolution of Young's first marriage, to Susan Acevedo. She'd filed for divorce in early October, with Young's solo album having been in the shops for barely five weeks.

He had bought Broken Arrow, named after one of his old Buffalo Springfield songs, in September 1970. It proved to be the ideal place to hunker down, escape from the world and write songs. The ranch foreman, Louis Avila – who still lived on site with his wife, Clara – drove him around the property in a battered old army jeep.

Avila, who appears briefly in *Harvest Time*, was the inspiration for one of Young's more ruminative new songs. As Young explains in the 2006 concert film *Heart Of Gold*, prior to playing *Old Man*: "He gets me up there on the top side of the place, and there's this lake there that fed all the pastures, and he says: 'Well, tell me, how does a young man like yourself have enough money to buy a place like this?' And I said: 'Well, just lucky, Louis, just real lucky.' And he said: 'Well that's the darnedest thing I ever heard.' And I wrote this song for him." ⊳

© JOEL BERNSTEIN 1970 / PRESS

Home sweet home: Young outside his Broken Arrow Ranch in California, circa 1971, and (opposite) in the living room there.

"Neil was using his entire house as the left speaker and his huge barn as the right speaker. What an incredible record it was."

Graham Nash on first hearing the *Harvest* album

Old Man is a sublime ballad. Decorated in its studio form by James Taylor's six-string banjo and Ben Keith's pedal steel, Young's lyrics draw parallels between him and Avila, at opposite poles of their lives. It often feels like a plea for companionship, a release from solitude. *'Twenty-four and there's so much more/Live alone in a paradise, that makes me think of two,'* Young sings, before his voice rises sharply into a keening chorus: '*Old man take a look at my life, I'm a lot like you/I need someone to love me the whole day through.*'

He didn't have to wait long. Young was alerted to Carrie Snodgress by his roadie, Guillermo Giachetti, who took him to watch her Oscar-nominated turn in the 1970 film *Diary Of A Mad Housewife*. A little while later, Young saw her in a theatre play in Los Angeles, and left her a note backstage after the performance.

The setting for their first date was hardly idyllic, though. Young had badly injured his back while attempting to shift an oversized hunk of walnut on the ranch, resulting in a spell in hospital. Snodgress came to visit, with Young dosed up on painkillers. "What a way to meet," he recalled in *Waging Heavy Peace*. "I was taking so much of the Soma Compound that I could hardly move. I liked her right away."

By the time they reconvened at a local coffee shop, Young was wearing an old-fashioned back brace. "It was gruesome," Snodgress later told Young biographer Jimmy McDonough, author of *Shakey*. "My choice was being an actress or a nurse, so Neil was right up my alley. I just got to nurse the hell out of him."

As romance bloomed, so did Young's writing. Some songs were inspired directly by Snodgress, chiefly *Harvest*, *Out On The Weekend*, *Heart Of Gold* and *A Man Needs A Maid*. The latter has since been subject to scrutiny for the contentious nature of its lyrics, but Young's devotion is made all too plain in the final verse: *'I fell in love with the actress/She was playin' a part that I could understand.'*

The new songs lent themselves to acoustic settings. Armed with piano and guitar, Young set out on a solo jaunt in the winter of 1970, beginning with a handful of dates at the Cellar Door in Washington DC and a couple of sold-out gigs at New York's Carnegie Hall. He moved through Canada in January, the highlight being two hometown shows in Toronto (eventually commemorated on 2007's magnificent *Live At Massey Hall 1971*).

Eleven days later, during a run of dates across the West Coast of the States, Young played Royce Hall at UCLA. There, his stark live rendition of the cautionary *The Needle And The Damage Done* was earmarked for *Harvest*. Young had been moved to write the song after witnessing too many musicians – "real good ones" – become addicted to heroin while out on the road. One of them was guitarist Danny Whitten, his recent Crazy Horse ally, who would succumb to an overdose the following year.

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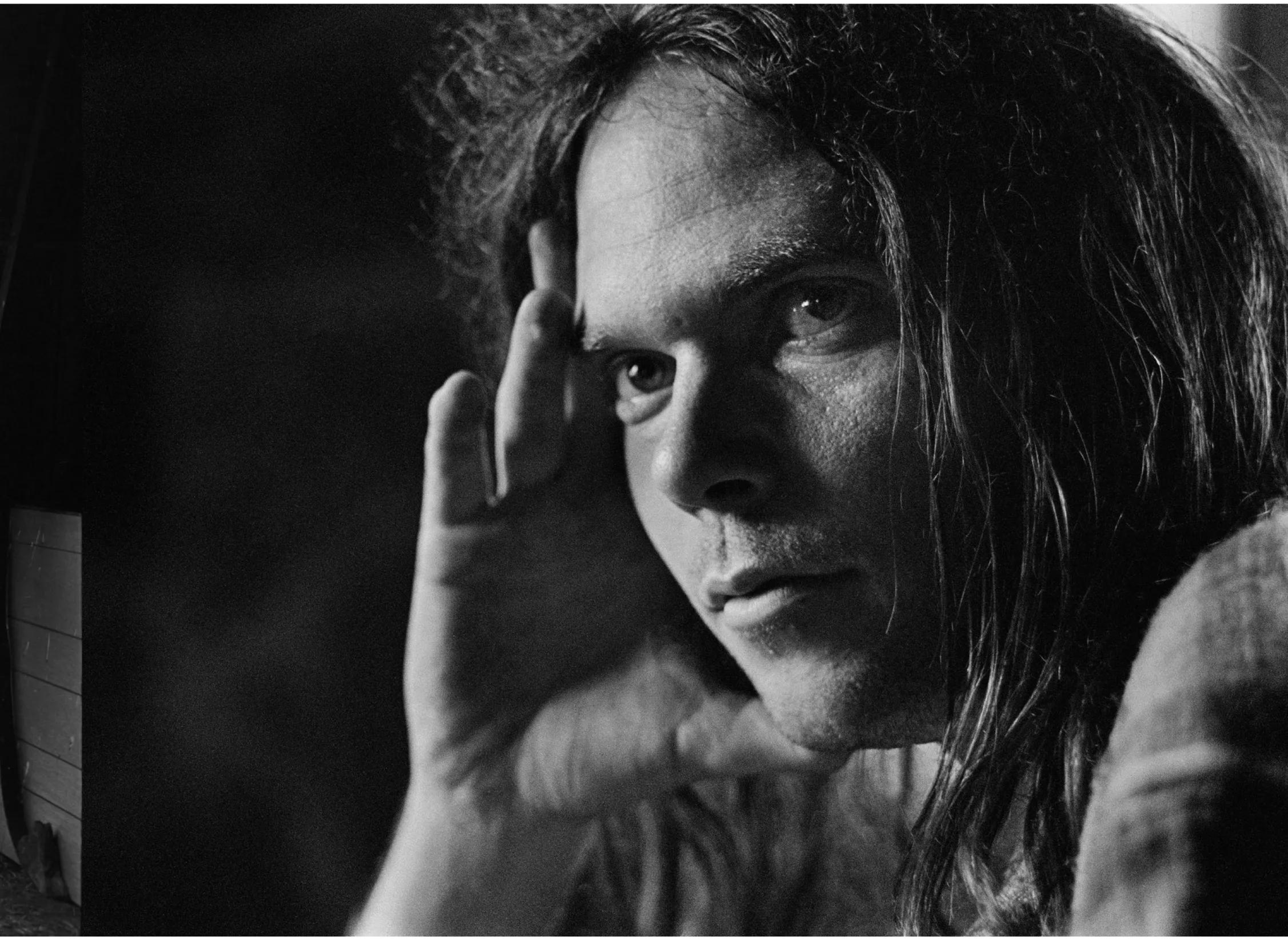

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By the time Young made it to Nashville he was ready to record more of the new songs, but had no way of going about it. He credits Mazer for making everything happen. "Elliot Mazer chose the musicians for the session and put the whole thing together," Young wrote on Archives. "*Harvest* would have never happened without Elliot. He is great. He was at the board, recording. We captured *Bad Fog Of Loneliness*, *Old Man* and *Heart Of Gold* that first day. James [Taylor] and Linda [Ronstadt] sang with me, overdubbing on the choruses."

Mazer's choice of musicians was indeed inspired. All three Stray Gators had serious pedigree. Bassist Tim Drummond had been part of Conway Twitty's ensemble before joining James Brown's backing band. As a teenager drummer Kenny Buttrey had toured with Chet Atkins, and was only 20 when he played on Bob Dylan's *Blonde On Blonde*. Dylan admired him so much that he retained him for his next three albums. Pedal steel player Ben Keith had forged a reputation around town as a country session musician, with credits that included Faron Young and Patsy Cline's *I Fall To Pieces*.

On pitching up at Quadrafonic, Keith later admitted: "I didn't know who anyone was, so I asked: 'Who's that guy over there?' and was told: 'That's Neil Young'". Unbeknown to both men, it was the start of a beautiful friendship. Keith would go on to collaborate with Young for nearly 40 years, appearing on more than a dozen albums and being an integral part of his live set-up.

"These were great musicians and wonderful people," Young remarked. "They were so tuned in to what I was doing. It was easy-going, and that was the beginning of life-long friendships between us… I was over my head with good fortune and luck combined."

"Those songs [on *Harvest*] have left a mark on me and many of the people I see in my life today."

Each of the musicians locked into Young's mind-set more or less straight away. Buttrey's minimal style and impeccable sense of time suited the relative simplicity of the songs. Drummond was a master of the subtle groove. Keith may have been steeped in country tradition, but his open and explorative approach was a mirror of Young's. "We recorded *Old Man* with the signature Ben Keith sound that went down in history," Young wrote. "What a musician!"

A couple of weeks later, Young was in London, recording a solo BBC *In Concert* show and playing at the Royal Albert Hall. The latter sold out in two hours. Both gigs featured a trove of songs that would make it onto his forthcoming album: *Old Man, Out On The Weekend, The Needle And The Damage Done, Harvest, Heart Of Gold, A Man Needs A Maid*.

Young already had bigger plans for *A Man Needs A Maid*. Two days after the Royal Albert Hall show, he turned up in the unlikely surrounds of Barking Assembly Hall (Barking Town Hall in the album credits), accompanied by manager Elliot Roberts and producer/arranger Jack Nitzsche, where the London Symphony Orchestra gave the song its wings. Footage of the session – captured in *Harvest Time* – is fascinating. It's very much a meeting of tribes: the Californian hippie longhairs, and the straight-backed classicists, all sensible cardigans and thick-rimmed glasses. Young is an exacting presence, pounding away on piano, modifying the feel and rhythm as he goes, setting the pace and the mood.

There are endless discussions with Nitzsche ⊳

and conductor David Meecham. "They definitely have to hear me," an exasperated Young tells Nitzsche at one point. "They were playing half a beat behind me all the way through the fucking thing." The final take required Meecham to conduct the LSO with one hand, while craning his head backwards to observe Young's every nuance, singing while playing piano.

The contrast between symphonic sweep and minor-key tones is enthralling. "After hearing the playback, Jack said: 'I think it's a bit overblown,'" Young recalled. "We knew it was over-the-top, but we had done it and we loved it."

Another new song, *There's A World*, was given a similar treatment at Barking, although it feels less successful. Young nevertheless came away refreshed, hailing it as "an amazing experience". *Harvest* was moving along. All he needed to do now was reconnect with the Stray Gators.

"I recorded most of *Harvest* in the [back] brace. That's a lot of the reason it's such a mellow album."

Returning to Quadrafonic in April 71, Young settled back in with producer Elliot Mazer and the band. A *Harvest Time* segment suggests a tight group of like-minded souls, thoroughly immersed in the music, locating the beating pulse of Young's songs in the studio.

Out On The Weekend is a softly chugging country ballad highlighted by wondrous playing by Ben Keith. The reflective *Journey Through The Past* didn't make the final album cut, but is in keeping with its prevailing mood. *Harvest*, the title track, is remarkable, guided by guest pianist John Harris. "He was quite an original," Young wrote, "obviously a genius livewire player with an amazing touch." Young would later declare that *Harvest* was the best song on the album.

Come September, the Stray Gators were at Broken Arrow, recording *Words*, *Alabama* and *Are You Ready For The Country* in Young's vast barn, on a wooden stage built by Carrie Snodgress's brother. "*Are You Ready For The Country* was written at the ranch shortly before the barn sessions happened," Young wrote on Archives. "It's a simple song based on an old blues melody that has been used many times. I thought it would bring some welcome relief from the other songs."

Mazer had rigged up PA speakers as monitors, and there were bales of hay behind the band. Nitzsche was perched on one of them, doubling up his piano parts with lap steel guitar. *Harvest Time* shows them in full flight, heads nodding, the sound bleeding out into bright Californian sunlight. Photographer Joel Bernstein caught the moment too, and his sepia-tinted photo adorns the back cover of the album. All eyes are fixed on Young, hunched over his Gretsch White Falcon, his black mane almost entirely masking his face. The scene looks fairly sombre in its unsmiling concentration, but the evidence proves otherwise. Perhaps more than anything else, *Harvest Time* is a celebration of the freedom and joys of creativity.

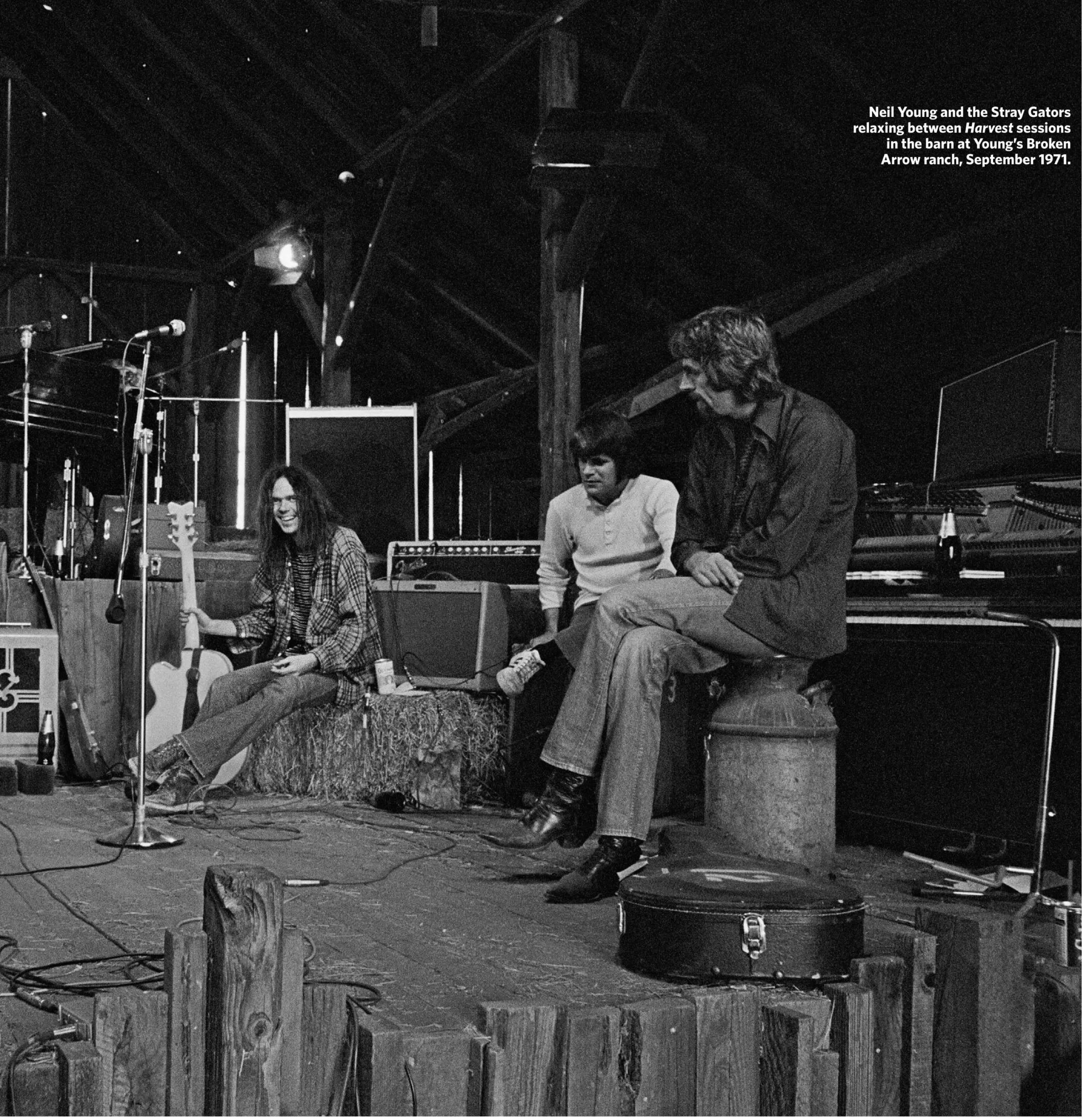
The band are clearly having a ball. As Young confides towards the end of the film: "I feel freer now than I've ever felt before. I can dig it. It's never been like that."

Harvest Time also shows backing-vocal sessions with Young's old bandmates; David Crosby and Stephen Stills work out harmonies for *Alabama*, before Young calls them over to join him at the piano, where they confer like giddy schoolboys. On a separate occasion, Stills, Young and Graham Nash refine the vocal blend of *Words*. It's all very cordial, the stresses of CSNY superseded by the very different demands of a solo album, energies channelled into a single cause.

With *Harvest* ready to go, Young was keen to share the results with close friends. Nash was invited to Broken Arrow one afternoon, giving rise to a tale that has now became embedded in popular legend.

"I remember the day that Neil asked me to listen to the record," Nash wrote in his autobiography *Wild Tales*. "No big speakers, but a boat. He rowed us both out into the middle of the lake. Once there, he asked Elliot Mazer to play the record. Neil was using his entire house as the left speaker and his huge barn as the right speaker. What an incredible record it was, and after the music stopped blaring, Elliot came down to the shore of the lake and shouted: 'How was that, Neil?' And I swear this is true, Neil shouted back: 'More barn!' That's Neil, no doubt about it."

The completion of *Harvest* roughly coincided with the alleviation of Young's physical pain. Having spent most of the year in his brace, he underwent an operation in August that involved removing two discs from his back. The impact of wearing the contraption had fed directly into the nature of the album itself. "I recorded most of



Neil Young and the Stray Gators relaxing between *Harvest* sessions in the barn at Young's Broken Arrow ranch, September 1971.

© JOEL BERNSTEIN 1971 / PRESS

Harvest in the brace," Young explained to *Rolling Stone* a few years later. "That's a lot of the reason it's such a mellow album. I couldn't physically play an electric guitar."

Harvest was trailed by the release of *Heart Of Gold* at the turn of 1972. By mid-March it had climbed to No.1 in the US, making its parent album even more of an event. Upon its release, on Valentine's Day, *Harvest* hit the ground running. Sales were strong. It was the kind of melodious, palatable record that seemed ripe for mass consumption and radio airplay.

For all the new-found contentment in his life, however, Young appeared to be less than fulfilled on much of the record. Opener *Out On The Weekend* begins with the lines: *'Think I'll pack it in and buy a pick-up/Take it down to LA.'* It's as downbeat a lyric as anything Young has done before or since.

"These were great musicians and wonderful people... I was over my head with good fortune and luck combined."

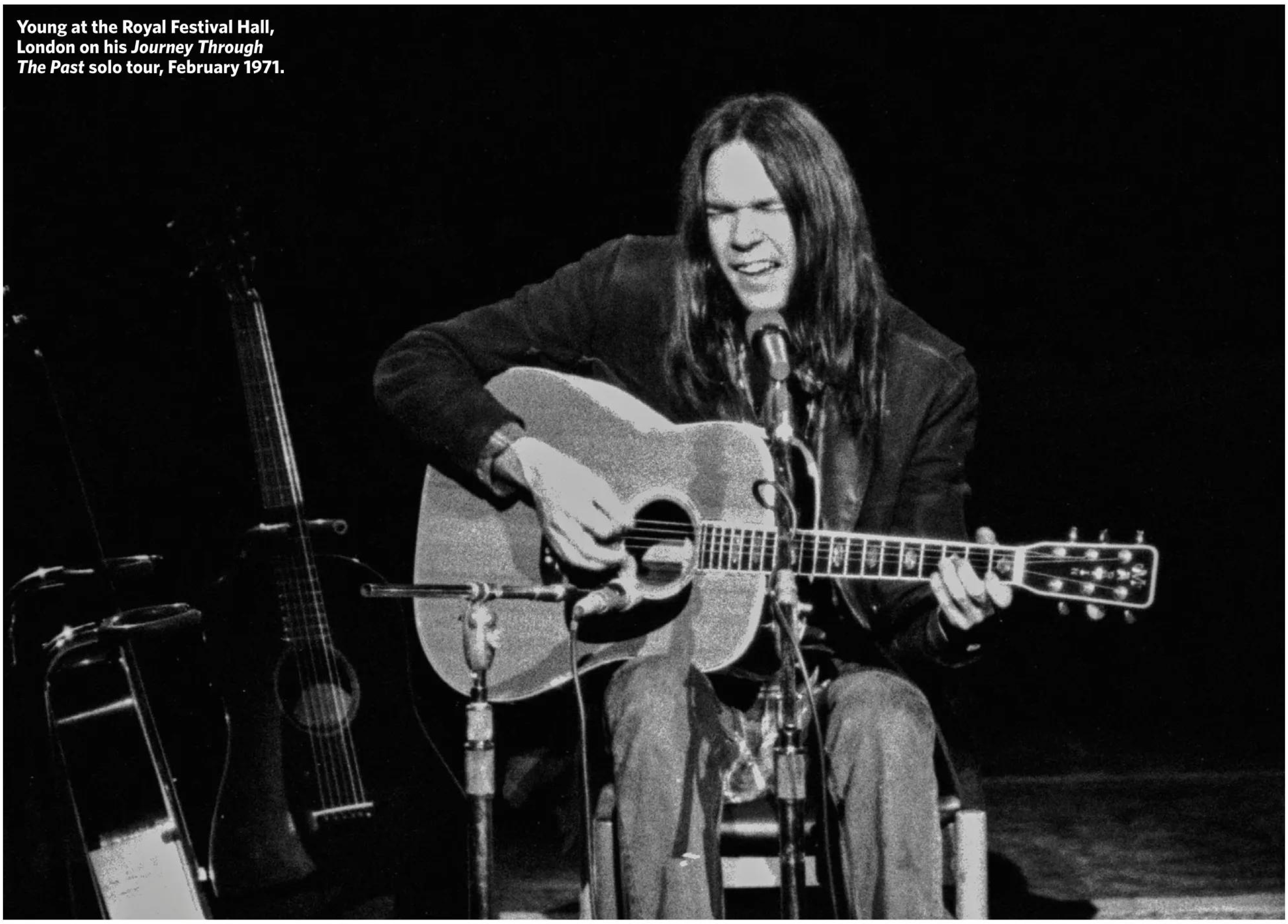
Young on the *Harvest* players

The song continues with its theme of loneliness and escape, its protagonist utterly defeated and unable to articulate his emotions: *'Can't relate to joy, he tries to speak and can't begin to say.'*

Elsewhere, the buoyancy of *Old Man*'s chorus is weighed down by dissolution. The title track is lyrically ambiguous. Ostensibly written for Carrie Snodgress, its dreamlike quality is undercut by a palpable sense of insecurity, as if Young is convinced that their relationship is doomed to fail. *'Will I see you give more than I can take?/Will I only harvest some?'* he sings during the final verse. *'As the days fly past will we lose our grasp?/Or fuse it in the sun?'*

Words speaks to the same concerns, along with Young's discomfort with the intrusions that fame and wealth tend to bring. Everywhere he looks, people are offering gifts and saying hello.

"*Words* is the first song that reveals a little of my early doubts of being in a long-term relationship with Carrie," Young confessed in *Waging Heavy*



Young at the Royal Festival Hall, London on his *Journey Through The Past* solo tour, February 1971.

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT / GETTY

Peace. "It was a new relationship. There were so many people around all the time, talking and talking, sitting in a circle smoking cigarettes in my living room. I am a very quiet and private person. The peace was going away. It was changing too fast… That was how we did *Harvest*, in love in the beginning and some doubts at the end."

The changes in Young's life are also referenced in *A Man Needs A Maid*. It's a song loaded with fear and vulnerability, seeking respite in the form of romantic love. That said, it's probably best known for its ill-judged second verse: '*I was thinking that maybe I'd get a maid, find a place nearby for her to stay/Just someone to keep my house clean, fix my meals and go away.*'

Feminists rightfully poured scorn on Young as a result. In his defence, he claimed the sentiment was never meant to be taken literally. As early as January 1971, when he was introducing *A Man Needs A Maid* to an audience at Boston's Music Hall, he explained: "It doesn't really mean what it says… So don't take it personally when I say it. I don't really want a maid."

Alabama brought controversy too. A companion piece to 1970's *Southern Man*, the song appeared to take aim at the state's resistance to progress and its history of segregation. Lynyrd Skynyrd famously hit back the following year with *Sweet Home Alabama*, calling out Young directly in the lyrics.

Young always maintained that *Alabama* was more of a personal sentiment, merely using the Southern state as a device for hiding its true meaning. He finally addressed the issue in *Waging Heavy Peace*, writing that he "richly deserved the shot Lynyrd Skynyrd gave me with their great record. I don't like my words when I listen to it today. They are accusatory and condescending, not fully thought out, and too easy to misconstrue."

Despite such shortcomings, by May '72 *Harvest* was the biggest-selling album in the US. Reviewers in the UK were quick to offer praise, but back in the States opinion was divided. *Rolling Stone* accused Young of pedalling weary clichés, having "seemingly lost sight of what once made his music uniquely compelling and evocative." To them, he was reduced to "just another pretty-singing solo superstar".

"I don't like my words when I listen to it today. They are accusatory and condescending, not fully thought out."

Young on his song *Alabama*

But Young was never the type of artist to pay much heed to music critics. It's a reasonable bet that he was more irritated by the fact that *Heart Of Gold* had been knocked from the top of the singles chart by a band that sounded like direct copyists: America's *A Horse With No Name* was so Young-like that, so the story goes, his father mistook it for his son and phoned to congratulate him on its success.

By then, Young was already heeding the call of the ditch. His response to superstardom was to make a weird experimental film. *Journey Through The Past* was a mess of old live and backstage footage, intercut with arty fantasy sequences. When it was released the following spring, no one went to see it. The double-album soundtrack fared equally badly.

In the early months of 1973, the Stray Gators backed Young on the *Harvest* tour. Those expecting a faithful reading of the album left disappointed. Instead, Young introduced a batch of raucous electric songs of variable merit that no one had heard before, then released it as *Time Fades Away*.

Everything that followed, for a good few years at least, seemed to be designed to leave *Harvest* far behind. But it wasn't the music that Young was running from, it was more the expectation. If he wanted to have a lasting career, then it had to be on his own terms.

Inducted into the Grammy Hall Of Fame in 2015, *Harvest* is now deservedly acknowledged as a major landmark. Young has since stated that the creation of the album was a big deal in his life. "Those songs have left a mark on me and many of the people I see in my life today," he offered. "If you are one of those people, a deeply felt thanks for being there."

The 50th Anniversary Edition of Harvest is out now via Reprise Records.

JOEL BERNSTEIN/PRESS

WE WANT IT ALL, AND WE WANT IT NOW

One minute they were taking the bus and watching their *Top Of The Pops* performance in a shop window, the next they had the world at their feet. With **Queen**'s debut album turning 50 this year, we look at the birth of the band that went from stars in their eyes and fierce ambition to rock royalty.

Words: **Mark Blake**

"Sir, are you married?" asked Marianne, a pupil in Mr May's mathematics class. "Sir, if you're married, why doesn't your wife iron your shirts?" she added, giggling.

Marianne Elliott-Said attended Stockwell Manor School in Brixton. It was spring 1972. Queen were making slow progress, so Brian May took a student teacher's job while he worked on his PhD.

Marianne and her friends liked Mr May. He looked a bit like Mick Robertson from children's TV show *Magpie*, and sometimes brought his guitar to class. He lived with his future wife, Chrissie, in a bedsit with limited space for ironing clothes.

"Brian was a very good teacher," Marianne recalled, decades later. "But he used to come in with his long hair and holes in his shoes, and we used to tease him." And so "Sir, are you married?" was often heard while May tried to teach some complex long division or geometry.

The joke ended in September that year when Queen's management put the band members on £20-a-week wages and Mr May handed in his notice. One of the senior staff took him aside. "You've got a proper job here, Brian," he said incredulously. "You're giving it up for a *pop* group?" But Mr May wouldn't be swayed. Queen were hungry, desperate even, for success.

Today, Queen + Adam Lambert are still basking in the box-office glow of the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* and rehearsing for another US stadium tour. It's easy to forget that Queen's global conquest was a long time coming.

Their debut album turns 50 in July. Home to their first single, *Keep Yourself Alive*, it's also the most impatient-sounding album ever made. As one of their familiars once remarked: "Queen wanted the world… and wanted it no later than teatime on Friday."

Queen began in June 1970. Before then, astrophysics student Brian May and trainee dentist and drummer Roger Taylor were two-thirds of Smile. The trio once opened for Jimi Hendrix but couldn't catch a break. Their confidence was especially shaken after seeing Led Zeppelin. "I felt sick," May admitted, "because they were doing what we were trying to do, only a lot better."

At the time, Zanzibar-born Farouk 'Freddie' Bulsara was a wannabe singer and art-student friend of Smile's bassist Tim Staffell. Bulsara occasionally roadied for Smile, but rarely managed more than carrying a crash cymbal from the van to the stage. He preferred to dress like a rock star and tell Smile where they were going wrong.

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Queen rehearsing for their first major tour, July 1973.

Bulsara's latest fashion accessory was a fluffy pompom attached to his wrist. "Very good, Brian," he'd purr, while flicking the pompom in May's direction. "But why don't you present the show like this?" Pompom flick. "Why don't you dress like this?" Pompom flick. "Why, Brian, why?"

After Tim Staffell quit Smile in the spring of 1970, their number-one critic made his move. "Freddie said: 'You're not giving up,'" recalled May. "He said: 'I'm going to be your singer, and we're going to do this and this and this…'" And with one more pompom flick, Freddie was in.

The new vocalist was full of ideas. A change of band name was the first. "'Queen' reflected the social world we were in at the time," explained Roger Taylor, who had a side hustle with Freddie running a second-hand clothes stall in Kensington Market. "There was an eccentric crowd there, and a lot of them were gay or pretended to be. I didn't like the name originally, and neither did Brian, but we got used to it.'

Soon after, Farrokh 'Freddie' Bulsara became Freddie Mercury. "Freddie had written a song called *My Fairy King*," May explained. "And there's a line in it that says: '*Oh Mother Mercury what have you done to me?*', and he said: 'I am going to become Mercury, as the mother in this song is my mother.' We said: 'Are you *mad?*'"

Mercury's fashion sense and ambition were also ahead of his vocal ability. He'd previously sung with two amateur groups, but neither May nor Taylor had taken him seriously. "Fred sounded like a powerful bleating sheep," said Taylor. "Not great. But he was a tribute to the idea that if you believe in something hard enough, you can make it happen. He believed in himself, and he believed in us."

So began two years of baby steps and false starts. Queen regularly played May's alma mater, Imperial College London, and opened for Wishbone Ash and Yes. It didn't matter if they were performing to half-a-dozen students and a barmaid, Mercury already had the moves and the sawn-off mic stand seen years later at Live Aid.

Off stage, he hustled any pop star who passed his and Taylor's market stall. "It freaked me out a bit," recalled Slade's bass guitarist Jim Lea.

"Freddie said: 'I'm going to be your singer, and we're going to do this and this and this…'"

Brian May

"Freddie said: 'You're Jim from Slade. I want to be famous like you.' I said: 'Look, mate, I've only come in here to buy something stupid to wear on *Top Of The Pops*.' I felt sorry for him, but I gave him some advice. Queen hadn't taken off then and I had no idea who he was."

Queen burned through three bass guitarists before finding unassuming electronics student John Deacon. His arrival in March 1971 was what they'd been waiting for.

Club DJ and A&R rep John Anthony had produced Smile's only single, *Step On Me*. "What I saw in them was a sort of 'Led Yes,'" Anthony told me, "because they had Yes's harmonies and Zeppelin's riffs. I was sure they'd do something, but not in that incarnation."

Anthony had a production company with another up-and-coming producer, Roy Thomas Baker. Queen invited them to a showcase at Wembley's De Lane Lea Studios, where they'd just cut a demo. The tape included *Keep Yourself Alive, Liar, Jesus, Great King Rat* and *The Night Comes Down*, all of which appeared later on *Queen*.

"*Keep Yourself Alive* sounded like a hit," Anthony said. 'I told them we were interested, but I was booked up producing other bands.'

However, Anthony and Baker had struck a deal with entrepreneurs Norman and Barry Sheffield, the sibling owners of Trident Studios in London. Trident's reputation was forged when Paul McCartney played the studio's Bechstein grand piano on *Hey Jude*. Now the Sheffields had extended the brand with management/production and film-making companies.

In March 1972, Anthony persuaded Barry Sheffield to attend Queen's gig at a nursing college. The group included a couple of off-beat covers, and when May began playing the riff to Shirley Bassey's *Big Spender*, Sheffield started laughing. "Right, that's it," he said. "We're having them."

Queen signed with Trident and stopped playing gigs. "I told them to lie low," said Anthony. "I wanted them to concentrate on getting their sound together."

Over the next four years, Trident funded the recording of Queen's albums and paid for new equipment, stage clothes and promo videos. But they also controlled Queen's song publishing, the rights to their music and management. "Trident

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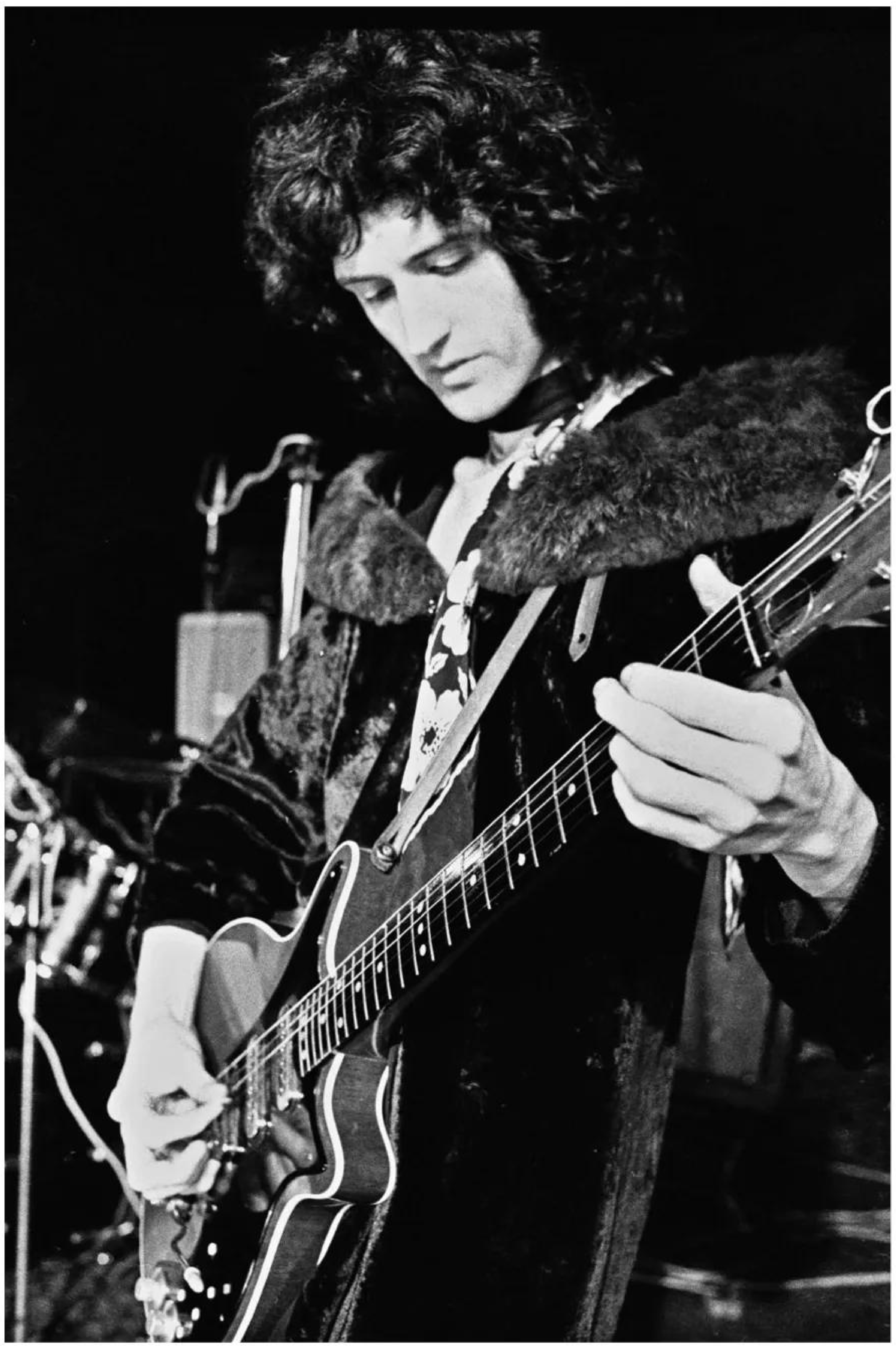

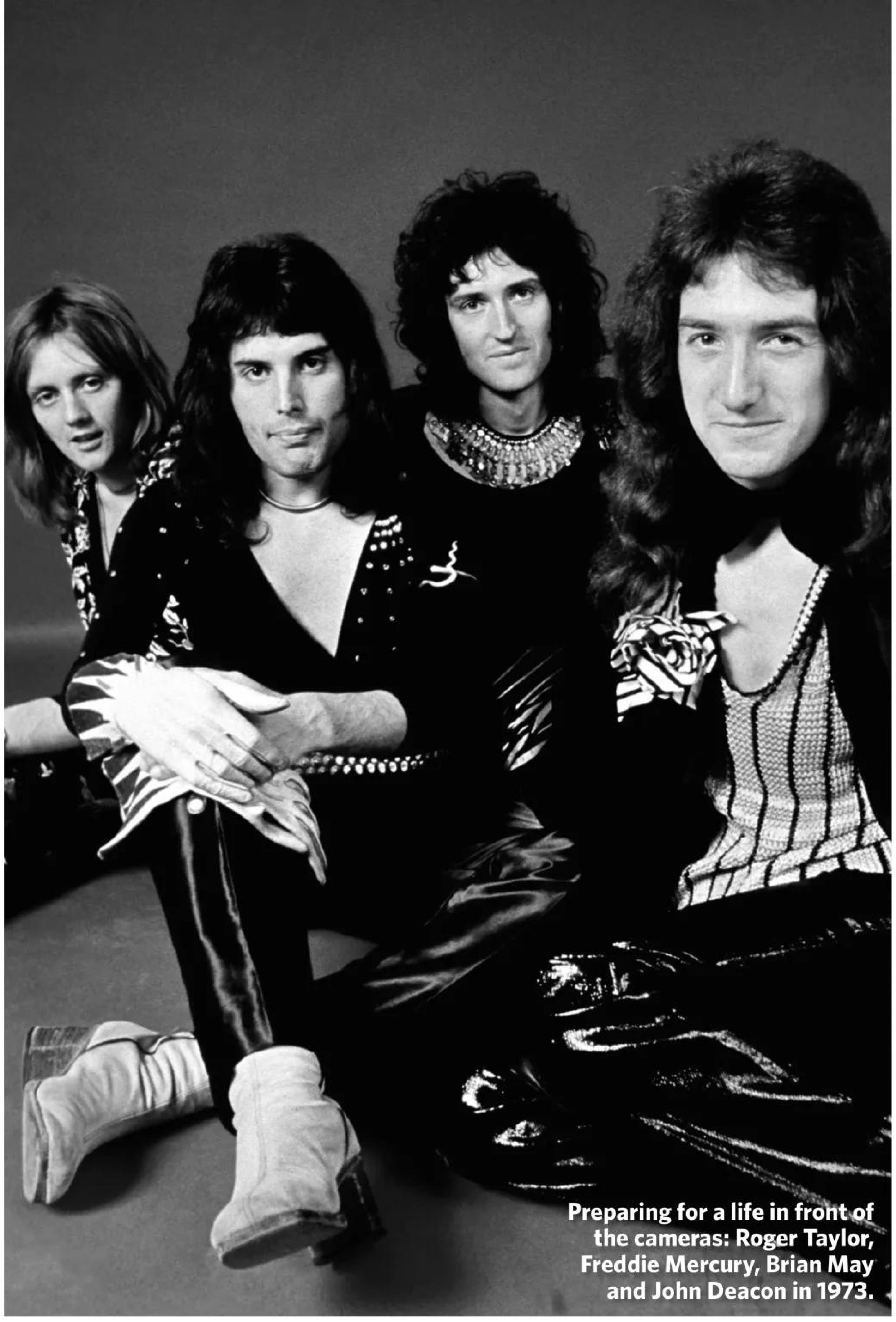

Preparing for a life in front of the cameras: Roger Taylor, Freddie Mercury, Brian May and John Deacon in 1973.

were wearing at least three hats," said May. "It was not ethical, and they took incredible advantage."

The best part of the deal was that Queen could use Trident Studios to make their first album. The caveat was they could only have it between 1am and 7am, "before the cleaners came in", said May.

The Star café on Great Chapel Street now became a fixture in Queen's nocturnal lives. The group would make four cups of coffee last, or, as a treat, head to The Ship pub in nearby Wardour Street. Soho bustled around them as Queen sat there, dressed to the nines, waiting to start work.

David Bowie was producing Lou Reed's new album *Transformer* at Trident. While Queen were teaching maths or selling up-cycled fur coats, Bowie was having hits.

In July, Mercury and Taylor watched him premiere his Ziggy Stardust alter ego at Friars in Aylesbury. "I thought: 'Bowie's done it, he's made his mark, and we're still struggling to get a record out,'" said May.

Now Queen arrived at Trident and saw Bowie *again*. "Literally, coming down the stairs as we were going up," Taylor recalled. Bowie later claimed he'd been asked to produce Queen's first album.

Queen's co-producers were John Anthony and Roy Thomas Baker. Mercury shared his vision with 'Johnnypoos', as he called him, early on. "Freddie showed me copies of *Queen* magazine [which later became fashion bible *Harpers & Queen*]," Anthony recalled. "Freddie said: 'This is what we are about. But it's not just the name, it's the pictures, the articles, the whole thing.' He had it all mapped out in his head."

Then Anthony collapsed in the studio and was diagnosed with mononucleosis. "I went to Greece to recuperate," he said. "So Roy took over."

Roy Thomas Baker had helped engineer T.Rex's *Get It On (Bang A Gong)* and Free's *Alright Now*. But Queen clashed with him over the mic'ing of the amps and drums. "We wanted everything to sound like it was in-your-face," said May. "We had this incredible fight to get the drums out of the booth and into the middle of the studio and to put the mics all around the room."

"Fred sounded like a powerful bleating sheep... [But] he believed in himself, and he believed in us."

Roger Taylor

However, Baker matched even Mercury for campness and grandiosity. He gushingly told Queen they were going to be "superstars", but pushed them hard on take after take. "Not good enough, dearie, try again," he'd declare. Baker's catchphrase, "Dearie me", was even mooted as an album title.

Baker had previous experience recording opera and classical music at Decca Records. "We never thought of Brian's guitar as a raunchy instrument, as most guitarists do,' he explained. "It was an orchestral instrument."

May and Baker spent hours making the guitar sound like every instrument in the orchestra; hence '…and nobody played synthesiser' in *Queen*'s sleevenotes.

As the night wore on, a bored Queen peered out of the window and watched the prostitutes and their clients below on St Anne's Court. "It was a little bit of a diversion," said Taylor. Listening to the album now, you can almost smell the collective coffee breath and see the band's bleary eyes as the sun rose over Soho. No wonder Mr May arrived at school wearing a crumpled shirt.

Meanwhile, fellow Trident producer Robin Geoffrey Cable was recording a version of the Beach Boys' hit *I Can Hear Music* next door. Cable overheard Mercury in full flight and asked if he'd sing on it.

Freddie agreed, and immediately began taking over: "Why not do this?" "Why not to do that?"… Before long, Taylor and May were also playing on the track. *I Can Hear Music* was released as a single a year later under the pseudonym Larry Lurex (a spoof of now-disgraced glam-rocker Gary Glitter). The single bombed, but gazumped Queen's official debut by a fortnight.

The tracks on *Queen* captured the freneticism of the sessions. The magisterial ballad *The Night Comes Down* and a version of Smile's *Doing All Right* were the only time the group paused for breath. In contrast, *Keep* ⊳

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Queen in '73. Inset: Freddie and members of tour headliners Mott The Hoople celebrate in Oxford that year.

Yourself Alive, *Liar* and *Son And Daughter*'s mish-mash of castrato harmonies and symphonic guitars sound like a group in perpetual motion.

Queen even snuck in a fragment of their future hit *Seven Seas Of Rhye* at the end of side two. "Because Freddie had only written half the song then," Taylor explained.

Mercury's *Great King Rat* and *My Fairy King* suggested a well-thumbed copy of *The Hobbit*, but apparently Mercury rarely read books. "Those songs are part of the zeitgeist," explained Taylor. "Marc Bolan was an elf, so it was perfectly acceptable." Meanwhile, he described his debut Queen song, *Modern Times Rock'n'Roll*, as "a bit of a thrash".

The album's greatest anomaly, though, was *Jesus*. Freddie was baptised into the Zoroastrian faith, but plundered the Bible for ideas. The Tim Rice/Andrew Lloyd-Webber musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* had just opened, and Queen's *Jesus* starts off like a show tune, and in the first verse has its titular hero healing lepers.

Other songs were considered but rejected. The underwhelming *Mad The Swine* was no loss. But *Hangman*, which sounded like Queen playing Black Sabbath's *Sweet Leaf*, would have been a welcome addition.

The creative battle of wills between Queen and their producer Baker didn't let up for a second. "Between Roy and I, we were fighting the whole time," said May, "trying to find a place where we had the perfection but also the reality of performance and sound."

Then John Anthony returned from Greece and insisted they remix the whole record. "*Keep Yourself Alive* sounded like it had been done at four in the morning, especially Roger's drums," he grumbled. And it probably had.

Working alongside them was 21-year-old assistant engineer Mike Stone. Stone impressed them all. His mix of *Keep Yourself Alive* was chosen for the album, and marked the beginning of a long and fruitful collaboration with Queen. Finally, in January 1973, Trident ordered everybody to step away from the mixing desk.

The company now had to sell the album to a record company. To begin with, they were met with disinterest and even hostility. "Queen? Are these guys homos?" enquired one A&R man. It also didn't help that Trident were flogging the record as part of a package, with albums by two other clients: ex-Rare Bird vocalist Mark Ashton, and Irish singer-songwriter Eugene Wallace.

Eventually EMI Records said yes. Queen then railroaded the company's art department into accepting their LP cover artwork: a Mercury-designed logo, and a photo of the singer "looking like a figurehead on the prow of an old ship," said May. The back-cover montage included photos taken at a friend's fancy-dress party: Freddie eating grapes, Roger as the Mad Hatter, and Brian wearing a homemade penguin mask complete with a working beak, which opened and closed when he spoke.

"What I saw in them was a sort of 'Led Yes', because they had Yes's harmonies and Zeppelin's riffs."

John Anthony, Smile producer

Taylor was listed in the credits by his full family name, Roger Meddows Taylor, and John Deacon became Deacon John. "To make him sound more interesting," suggested one wag.

"John Deacon never said a word," recalled John Anthony. "Just stood at the back, going along with it all."

Queen was released on July 13, 1973, more than a year after the group had started work on it. The sleeve-notes said as much: "…Representing, at last, something of what Queen's music has been over the last three years…" Some reviews were positive – "Superb," declared *Rolling Stone*. Others were less so – "A bucket of stale urine," sniffed *New Musical Express*.

"We were into glam rock before Bowie," a petulant May told *Melody Maker*. "But we're worried we might have come too late." Androgynous boys in bands were indeed on trend. Bowie had just released *Aladdin Sane*, and Roxy Music, with their leopard-print and feather boas, had just bagged a hit single and album. "So we don't want people to think we're jumping on their bandwagon," May insisted.

Unfortunately, *Queen* stalled just outside the Top 30. That summer, London's No.9 bus became the scene of many an earnest discussion. "If you ever get on a number nine, go upstairs to the front left, that's where Freddie and I used to sit," recalled May. "We used to get the bus up to Trident to ask why they weren't doing anything with our record."

The double-decker inched down Kensington Gore towards London's West End. "God, I hope this band takes off," Mercury fretted, staring down at the Royal Albert Hall. "I don't know what I'm going to do if it doesn't."

Finally there was some good news. Mike Appleton, producer of the BBC TV's flagship music programme *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, had received an unmarked promo of *Queen*. Appleton liked *Keep Yourself Alive*, but didn't know who Queen were or how to contact them. So to accompany the track he used an animation based on a cartoon used in President Roosevelt's election campaign, and broadcast it on the show. Queen were annoyed by the film, and then excited by the publicity. The group filmed a promo for the single, but Mercury had shaved his chest and hated the results. Once the hair had re-grown, they shot another. ▷

MAIN: GETTY; INSET: SHUTTERSTOCK

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Shapes of things: Queen rehearsing in '73.

A star is born: Freddie Mercury giving it the full rock star even in rehearsals.

Keep Yourself Alive was the first song May ever wrote for Queen. But it wasn't a hit. "It didn't get played on the radio," he said. "We kept getting told: 'It takes too long to happen, boys. It's more than half a minute before you get to the first vocal…'"

The trouble was, Queen also considered their debut album a little passé, and were forging ahead with new ideas. In November they played a bunch of new songs while supporting Mott The Hoople on a UK tour.

Mott's biggest cheerleader, David Bowie, had written their hit breakthrough hit *All The Young Dudes*, which turned them into pop stars. But Mott were a people's band, with little time for highfalutin progressive rock. Neither they nor their crew had seen anything like Queen when they arrived for their first rehearsal. Everybody else at London's Manticore Studios was dressed for a bleak British winter; Queen were in their satin stage clothes. According to one roadie, the general consensus was that Freddie was "a bit of a wally".

Trident paid £3,000 to get Queen on the tour. For a support act, they were undoubtedly precocious, hustling for more stage space and a drum riser. The headliners bristled at their demands, but Queen were too good to be dismissed. The groups travelled on the same bus, and quickly bonded.

"Brian was a very intelligent man," said Mott's lead vocalist Ian Hunter, "and Fred had so much confidence it was funny. I don't think he even knew he was funny, which made it even funnier. In his head he was a star already."

"We picked up a lot from Mott about stagecraft and connecting with an audience," admitted May. "It was a true education. We took some of their tricks and started using them."

Mott's signature song, *All The Way From Memphis*, included the line: *'You look like a star, but you're still on the dole.'* It could have been written about their support act. Queen were riding the No.9 bus with holes in their shoes, but behaved like they were headlining Madison Square Garden.

Everything Queen learned in the studio and on the road coalesced in time for their big break. In February 1974, David Bowie turned down *Top Of The Pops* because of prior commitments. Queen took his place and performed the full version of *Seven Seas Of Rhye*, even though it hadn't yet been pressed as a single. They had taken the criticism of *Keep Yourself Alive* on board. "We thought: 'Right, we'll show 'em,'" said May. "*On Seven Seas Of Rhye* everything happens quickly."

"Fred had so much confidence it was funny. I don't think he even knew he was funny. In his head he was a star already."

Ian Hunter

The song was a calling card for their next album, *Queen II*, and crammed cod-classical piano, screaming harmonies, Brian's one-man London Symphony Orchestra, and lyrics about *'the mighty Titan and his troubadours'* into a tight two minutes and 49 seconds.

"I never understood a word of it," Roger Taylor admitted. "I don't think Freddie did, really."

None of the group owned a television, so they trooped down to an electrical goods shop in Kensington and watched their *Top Of The Pops* performance through the window. It was a watershed moment. "Finally, something was starting to happen," said May. "We wanted to prove it to our friends and families, but mostly to ourselves."

Seven Seas Of Rhye became Queen's first Top 10 hit, and they never looked back. After winning a lengthy legal battle with Trident, their career soared with the hit single *Bohemian Rhapsody* and the albums *A Night At The Opera* and *A Day At The Races*. By the end of the 70s, Queen had equalled or overtaken the competition, including their nemesis David Bowie.

Fifty years ago, Queen's debut album captured a young, restless group who, in the words of their future hit, wanted it all and wanted it now. But they weren't the only ones dreaming of stardom.

In 1974, Mr May's former pupil Marianne Elliott-Said ran away from home to attend a music festival and travel around the country. She was living in a squat when she saw her old maths teacher wearing a cape and throwing shapes on *Top Of The Pops*. "I thought: 'That looks good for a laugh,'" she said.

Marianne later changed her name to Poly Styrene, formed the punk group X-Ray Spex, and had two Top 20 hits. She died of cancer in 2011.

Some years earlier, Brian May was parking his car in Soho near the Radha-Krishna Temple, where Poly was a devotee. Ex-teacher and pupil spotted each other immediately. Mr May still had long hair, even if now his shirt was ironed and his shoes didn't have any holes. May walked towards her and made the joke before she could. "Sir," he said, grinning. "Are you married?"

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The Soundtrack Of My Life

Alice Cooper guitarist *Nita Strauss* on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to her.

Interview: **Henry Yates**

NITA STRAUSS: JOHNNY YOUNG/PRESS; MATT BELLAMY: GETTY

"She looks like a model and plays like Eddie Van Halen," was Alice Cooper's assessment of Nita Strauss when she joined his live band on guitar in 2014 – but the Californian virtuoso has always made sure it was her fretwork that opened doors. Beyond Alice, Strauss has lent her blazing licks to projects spanning from tribute band the Iron Maidens to this year's star-studded second solo album *The Call Of The Void*, while her eclectic listening tastes suggest there isn't a gig in the world she couldn't handle.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

My sister and I grew up doing ballet, so we listened to a lot of classical, and Bizet's *Carmen* is probably my strongest childhood music memory.

THE FIRST RIFF I LEARNT

As a young player in the early 2000s, I specifically remember learning Linkin Park's *One Step Closer*. Getting the harmonic in the middle of that main riff, I just felt like I was the greatest guitar player in the world!

THE SONG THAT REMINDS ME OF ADOLESCENCE

I get to play it every night with Alice Cooper – *I'm Eighteen*. I think that's the quintessential adolescence song. When I was eighteen I was single-mindedly set on becoming a professional musician. But at that time I thought the way to get taken seriously in the industry was to be able to party and hang with the older bands. So I was a mess at the time.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

Smashing Pumpkins' *Bullet With Butterfly Wings*, at a middle school jog-a-thon, with everyone running in laps while I played. I probably didn't pull it off as well as I thought I did, but I don't think anyone was paying attention.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

Impossible! But if we're talking guitar albums, I don't know that anything tops Steve Vai's *Passion And Warfare*. It's such a complete record, that perfect balance of technique, songwriting, emotion and energy.

THE SINGER

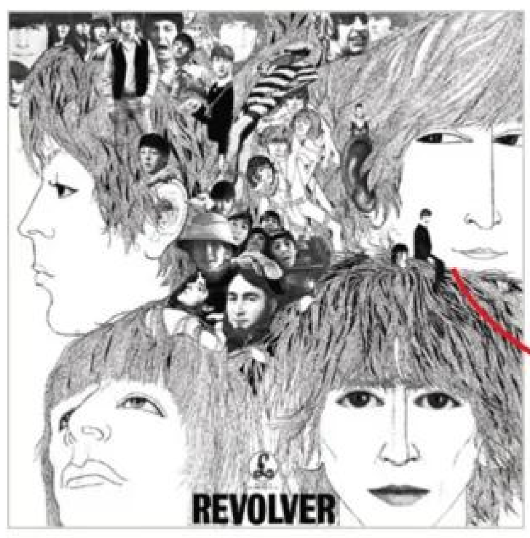
The first person that pops into my head is Bruce Dickinson. But I also had the pleasure recently to work with Alissa White-Gluz from Arch Enemy. For my money she's up there with the best of the best. She can do anything from high cleans to death-metal growls.

THE GUITAR HERO

I'm talking about Steve Vai a lot, but he's the reason I picked up a guitar. The *Crossroads* movie did it for me. He played the Devil's guitar player and had this sexy charisma. The first time I met him was after a Generation Axe show. I remember he came out, quintessential Steve Vai, in a black mesh shirt and jewellery. He told me he was putting together a compilation album of female guitar players and would I like to contribute? I was like: "Absolutely! One hundred per cent! Wonderful!" I must have said 'yes' twelve different ways.

THE BEST LIVE BAND I'VE SEEN

I just saw Muse for the first time and that show was unbelievable. The production, the lights, the big inflatables, it was just unreal. I'm used to big production from playing with Alice, which makes it even more impressive that I was so floored. They have such a huge sound for a three-piece too.



THE SONGWRITER

I still don't think anyone has ever done it better than The Beatles. Bands these days are still following their formula. I love *Revolver*, it's a bit more rock'n'roll, a harder-driving album.

THE ANTHEM

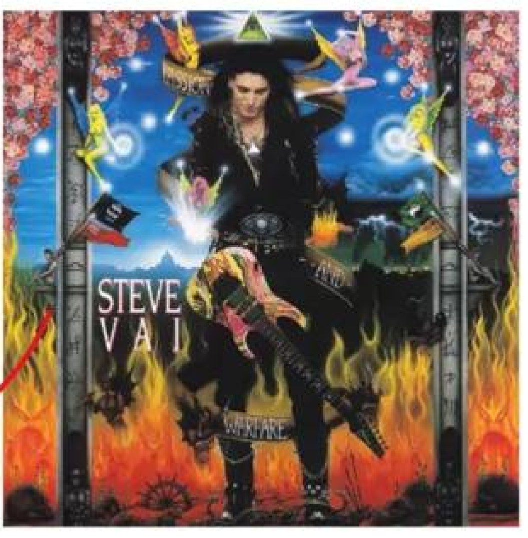
It doesn't get much better than Queen's *We Will Rock You*. That's one of those songs where if you're alone in the car, you just have to beat the steering wheel.

MY KARAOKE SONG

Bon Jovi's *Livin' On A Prayer*. I have a secret weapon, because my best friend and keyboard player, Katt Scarlett, is also my karaoke partner. She is a phenomenal singer. And while I may not be a great vocalist, I harmonise well. I haven't done karaoke since I've been sober.

MY SOBER COACH

I first met Zakk Wylde – another one of my great heroes – backstage at a festival. I was newly sober and he's been sober a little longer. I was like a little kid, going up to everyone saying: "Do you have any advice?" And Zakk says: "Little hurricane… just stop being a pussy." He gave me this locker-room pep talk: "You are a badass woman and that liquid has no power over you." By the end of this conversation I felt so powerful I could have run through a wall. It was the nicest way anyone has ever told me to stop being a pussy.



MY GUILTY PLEASURE

I've made no secret of my love of nineties boy bands. And actually, this is a common thread of the girls I know in metal bands: we all love Backstreet Boys and NSYNC. We had some Backstreet Boys on when I was at merch doing autographs the other day, and everyone in my band was singing every single word and our fans were laughing at us. It's good to be silly sometimes.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

Not to do a shameless plug, but I have a song on my upcoming record called *Kintsugi*, about how when something's broken in our life it's our human nature just to throw it away. But the art of kintsugi is about repairing the things that are broken and becoming stronger for it. So that song might give people the inspiration to carry on.

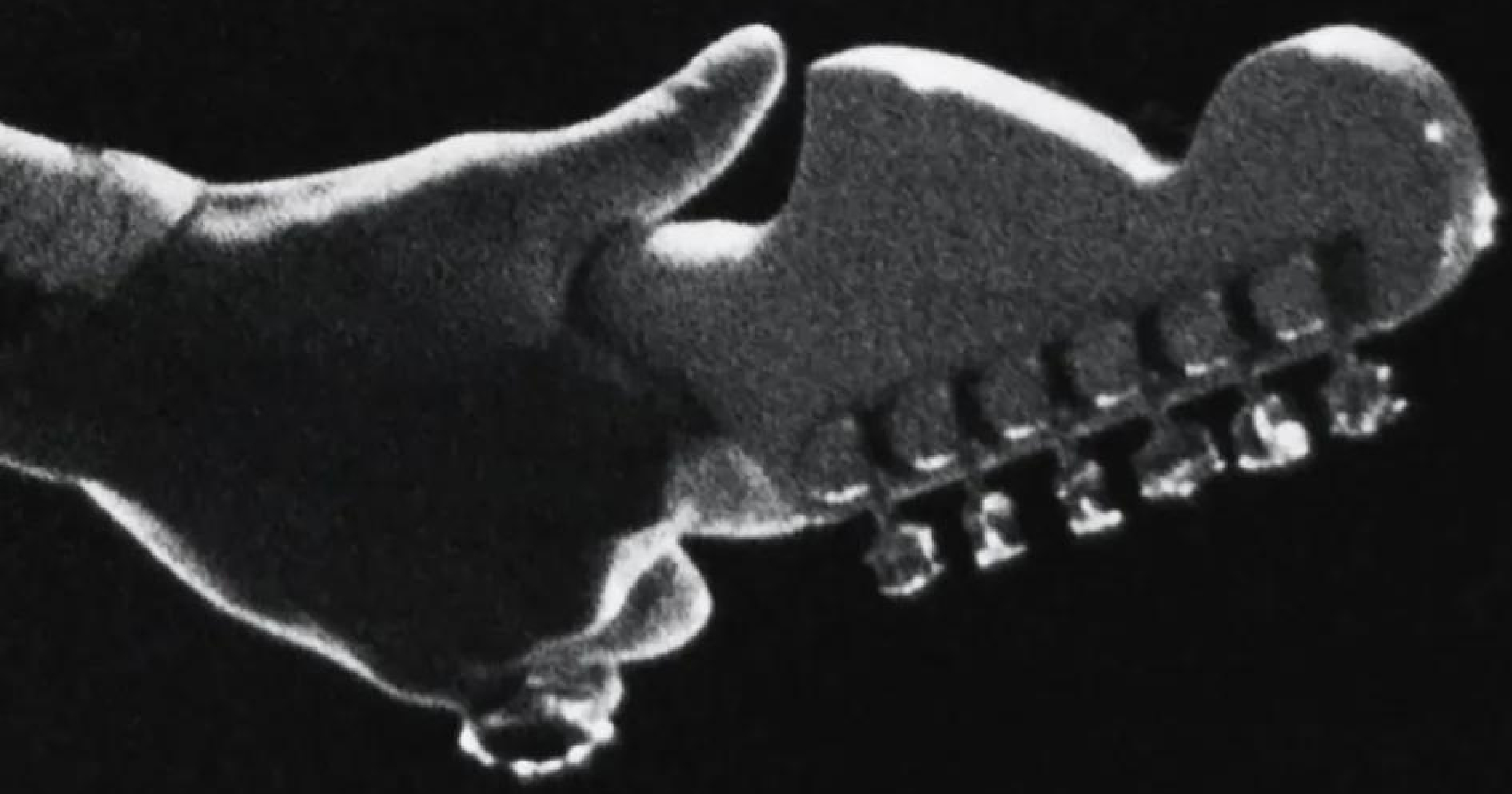
"I just saw Muse for the first time and that show was unbelievable. It was just unreal."

The Call Of The Void is out now via Sumerian.

EXPERIENCE THIS!

He was the greatest guitarist ever to pick up the instrument, but what is sometimes overlooked is his talent as a songwriter, a singer and also how he often made other writers' songs his own. As a celebration of **Jimi Hendrix** in the month when he would have turned 80, stars and those who knew him choose his greatest songs, relive personal memories and reflect on his legacy.

Words: **Henry Yates**, **David Sinclair**, **Jason Sidwell**, **Dave Ling**, **Milton Mermikides**, **Jonny Scaramanga**, **Amit Sharma**, **Jonathan Horsley**, **Chris Bird**



BARRIE WENTZELL

Kissing the sky: Hendrix in full flow at the Fillmore West in San Francisco, February 1968.

ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER

Alex Lifeson: "I always loved *Manic Depression*, but I think *All Along The Watchtower* is really special, even though, funnily enough, it's not one of Hendrix's songs. The arrangement is so striking and beautiful. Whenever I hear it on the radio or in passing, I'm instantly transported to a certain time in my life. When you listen to those acoustic guitars and the way it's recorded – and this goes for the whole album too – there's something that's so creamy and warm and enveloping. It's the sound of that song and the way all the parts cross over. It's just a fabulous example of Hendrix at his best."

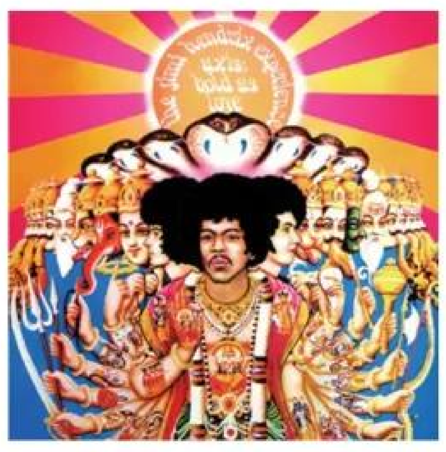
Bob Dylan said *All Along The Watchtower* was "a small song of mine that nobody paid any attention to".

Released in September 1968 as the lead single from *Electric Ladyland, All Along The Watchtower* was not so much a cover as a song entirely reinvented. To hear it was to almost forget the existence of the original, which now seemed a mere blueprint by comparison. The single reached No.5 in the UK and No.20 in the US, making it Hendrix's breakthrough success in his homeland. To date it has been streamed on Spotify more than 560 million times – more than twice the total of the song in second place, *Purple Haze*.

As for Dylan, he was magnanimous. "It overwhelmed me, really. [Hendrix] had such talent, he could find things inside a song and vigorously develop them. He found things that other people wouldn't think of finding in there. He probably improved upon it by the spaces he was using. I took licence from his version, actually, and continue to do it to this day."

ANGEL

Six months after his death, Hendrix lived again in March 1971, as *Angel* led out the first posthumous album, *The Cry Of Love*, and announced that the late guitarist's catalogue would be a going concern. As you'd expect of *Little Wing*'s sister song (for a time the two tracks even shared a title), *Angel* was a peerless moment of glisten and shimmer, with a valedictory chorus that seemed purpose-made for the star's passing (although Hendrix had actually written it about a dream that foresaw his mother's death). With a chorus that punctured the mainstream consciousness, for many *Angel* is his greatest ballad.



ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

The Experience's debut album might have opened up with *Foxy Lady*'s chart-tooled swagger, but the final straight had a bolder trick up its sleeve, with a title track that signposted the epic studio productions to come. Mitch Mitchell's military drum tattoo was the anchor of a free-form sonic tapestry that bent to Hendrix's will, sweeping up backwards guitars that were more raga than rock, a solo seemingly beamed in from another track, and a woozy call to arms that urged the listener to ditch the denizens of their *'measly little world'* – far better, Jimi suggests, to *'hold hands and watch the sunrise from the bottom of the sea'*.

BOLD AS LOVE

Uli Jon Roth: "*Bold As Love* is not really a rock song, it's just a masterpiece, an

BARON WOLMAN COLLECTION/ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME/ ICONIC IMAGES

artistic masterpiece of the first order. It is completely unconventional. Everything about that piece is unconventional. It doesn't follow any established pattern. It is a complete one-off, which is the hallmark of quite a few of Hendrix's best pieces. It has got magical chord changes and a magical key and even more magical guitar solo at the end, and the lyrics are amazing too.

"It is his most beautiful guitar solo, if not the most beautiful solo of all time. What can we learn from this song? We can learn the simple realisation that the greatest songs of all time have not followed the established patterns – very rarely have they followed established patterns, and *Bold As Love* is in that league – as are many of the greatest Beatles songs. So that's a lesson to learn right there."

Axis: Bold As Love's semi-title track was redolent of *Little Wing* in the opening measures, but the revelation came at 2:50, when engineer Eddie Kramer unveiled the stereo phasing that he and tape operator George Chkiantz had used to treat the drums. "When Jimi first heard that," Kramer recalled, "he fell off the couch, yelling at me: 'Oh my god, this was in my dream!'" Rising to the occasion, for the outro Jimi played a soulful, album-best solo that climaxes with frantic tremolo picking and, according to Experience bass player Noel Redding, was created on the fly: "The ending and the build-up was all spontaneous between the whole band."

CASTLES MADE OF SAND

Mark Tremonti: "You can't not stumble across a Hendrix lick when you're learning to play guitar. Everybody's been influenced by him in one way or another. Being a guitar player, everybody was always saying he was the 'best guitar player in the world', so at first I was too intimidated to learn his stuff, because I thought it would be way too difficult. When I actually did try it, I realised that it wasn't the technical side of his playing that made people consider him the best, it was his feel, his approach, and all the things and sounds he pioneered.

"*Are You Experienced* was probably the first album I was exposed to, but I think *Purple Haze* might have been the first song I tried to learn on guitar, and of course I've learned *Hey Joe* and a few others over the years. My favourite now would probably be *Castles Made Of Sand*. That's one of those songs that you put on and it just makes you feel good. It's got a lot of emotion and soul. Just a feel-good song."

Eddie Kramer saw this late addition to *Axis: Bold As Love* as "Jimi's imagination run wild". Certainly that's true of the ▷

JEN ROSENSTEIN

WHAT JIMI MEANS TO ME

BILLY F GIBBONS

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"I had a girlfriend from Texas who found herself on holiday in London, and she had the foresight to pick up a copy of the first Jimi Hendrix Experience record [*Are You Experienced*, '67] and forward it to the States. I had my hands on it early on, certainly before its US release. And I remember standing at the turntable with eyes wide and jaw dropped. I was seventeen when that record landed in my lap and I was ready to just soak it up. There was hours spent just listening to the way he phrased his stuff.

"It was operating on a number of levels. The technique stood out immediately, and it was bolstered by some tone that had not become commonplace. I can almost bet that the engineers who designed the Fender Stratocaster never knew that these sounds would emanate from their handy invention. In the hands of Jimi Hendrix it was otherworldly."

MEETING HENDRIX

When the Jimi Hendrix Experience's tour reached Texas in February 1968, Gibbons's teenaged group the Moving Sidewalks opened the show. They didn't have enough songs of their own to fill their 40-minute slot, and included covers of Hendrix's *Foxy Lady* and *Purple Haze* before Hendrix came on.

"To try and wrap your head around those compositions, it was something so new you didn't quite know where to begin. We were fortunate to be able to interpret our versions of *Foxy Lady* and *Purple Haze*. They were Texas interpretations. On leaving the stage I was grabbed by the shoulders and there was Hendrix smiling. He said: 'I got to meet you. You got a lot of nerve! I like it.'"

FAVOURITE HENDRIX SONGS

"*Foxy Lady* and *Purple Haze* still reign supreme. The mind was twisted with the first album, then when he interpreted *All Along The Watchtower* it went from Dylan's ownership to suddenly it became Hendrix's song. Then there's *Red House*. You can't overlook Hendrix's interpretation of the blues form. Quite recently they found a version of Hendrix playing an up-tempo version of Bobby Bland's song *Further On Up The Road*. And it's killer! Just wild. There's all sorts of interesting revelations when you find versions of songs where you can just hear the vocal track as it's being recorded. They must have gone back and found some of the original tapes with the vocal track. His singing style was so natural, very much off-the-cuff. He didn't have to go back and re-sing much."

HENDRIX SONGS COVERED BY ZZ TOP

"Hendrix taught me how to do the string squiggle at the beginning of *Foxy Lady*. It's a trick you have to practice, learning the use of, I should call it, controlled vibrato. Combine that with the power of a 100-watt Marshall amp and you can get some crazy tricks going off.

"The other song that really holds intrigue to this day: *Little Miss Lover*. It's either a drummer's delight or a drummer's nightmare. Frank Beard said the challenge is in the right hand playing quarter notes, and between the snare and the kick playing not only eighth notes but sixteenth notes. And then there's a push beat in the middle of all that. It's really a workout. But if you can get through it, it'll leave you smiling, that's for sure. We played it early on. But we haven't dusted that one off in quite some time."

WHAT MADE HENDRIX SO SPECIAL

"Let's use the word 'willingness'. I was talking about this with Jeff Beck recently. The Stratocaster, the whammy bar, was capable of some pretty dramatic changes in pitch – the dive-bomb effect – and they had yet to perfect a way to keep it in tune. There are some recorded examples of Hendrix just going crazy with the whammy bar and it knocked the guitar pitifully out of tune. But his willingness... he just said 'The hell with it. We're gonna go on!' And go on they did. The other word to use is 'curiosity'. Part of that curiosity was fuelled by the sudden appearance of foot pedals to make all kinds of interesting ways to distress the guitar signal."

"He was always practising. Always curious about the next unusual twist. He was fascinated by Jeff Beck's playing. I have vivid recollections of tip-toeing into Hendrix's hotel room, and he always had a record player, a giant piece of furniture, in his room. He said: 'Man, how do you think Jeff Beck is doing this?' And I said: 'Well, I can probably imagine Jeff Beck is scratching his head wondering the same about you.'"

THE POWER OF THREE

"The limitations of a trio are many. But along with the word 'limitation' goes the word 'invitation'. It's inviting to see how far you can push it under such austere conditions; Clapton, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker didn't do a bad job with Cream. When Hendrix came along his ensemble was just made to order. Their live recordings stand as testament to how ground-breaking they were as a unit. They were filling in the gaps in just the right places. ZZ Top took a cue from what I would call that spare but exquisite format."

INTERVIEW: DAVID SINCLAIR

production – the burbling backwards guitar still sounds revolutionary – but the lyric is perhaps his most grounded in reality, Hendrix tracking a disintegrating family unit that younger brother Leon claimed was their own: "That is the story of our life, about my mother and father arguing, in the first verse. I'm the little Indian boy who before he was ten played war games in the woods – that's my verse. And then the last verse is about our mother. Jimi came home and said: 'This is our family song'."

CROSSTOWN TRAFFIC

Three tracks into *Electric Ladyland*, Hendrix dropped the album's first jukebox moment and most accessible track. For once including all three Experience members – plus Dave Mason on backing vocals – *Crosstown Traffic*'s rocket-heeled R&B would have thrilled under any circumstances, with Hendrix splicing chords and single-note runs within the same guitar part. But the pièce de résistance was Hendrix's joyous doubling of the hook, tooting on a comb wrapped in tissue paper for a kazoo effect.

People talk a lot about Hendrix the guitar god, and not enough about Hendrix the writer of banging pop songs. There have been entire albums released with fewer hooks than the first half of *Crosstown Traffic*. Jimi's use of dominant-7 and minor-7 chords in this song helps to set him apart from heavy rock guitarists who were limiting themselves to power chords.

FOXY LADY

Few recorded sounds in '67 held more anticipation than the shiver of vibrato and feedback that ignited *Foxy Lady*. The song, when it crashed in, caught the guitarist at his hardest, hookiest and most primal, the riff's shrill payoff demanding attention every few seconds. But Hendrix rejected interpretations that the lyric was a brash ode to womanising, and it's more likely the title referred to his times with on/off girlfriend Lithofayne Pridgon. "He used to call every pet we had Foxy," Pridgon told *The Guardian*. "Or if I put on certain things, he'd say: 'Wow, you look foxy in that.'"

HEY BABY (NEW RISING SUN)

Hendrix chipped away at *Hey Baby* for more than two years – christening and retitling it a number of times along the way – and you can hear the guitarist's ever-changing moods in the shapeshifting track that finally appeared on his second posthumous album, 1971's *Rainbow Bridge*. The intro underwhelms slightly with its dour, non-committal churn, but *Hey Baby* finds its groove with the reggae-ish chop that enters after the first minute, before Jimi finds his voice ("Is this microphone on?") and the song joins the canon with the propulsive lift-off of the *'Hey girl, I'd like to come along'* refrain. That fourth album would have really been something.

HEY JOE

Hendrix's arrival in London in September 1966 sent shock waves through the music community. Like some left-handed guitar-playing James Bond, women wanted to be with him, and men – especially Eric Clapton – wanted to be him.

The culmination of that summer of madness was Hendrix's debut single. *Hey Joe* was a murder ballad, previously recorded by US folkie Tim Rose. The story of a man who shoots his 'cheatin' ol' lady' and flees to Mexico was blunter than anything by supposed bad boys The Who or the Rolling Stones.

Initially, *Hey Joe*, with its gospel-style backing vocals, pottered along like a regular pop song. Then, around the 1:27 mark, Hendrix's increasingly fervent vocals and stun-gun guitar took it somewhere new. The result was an exercise in menace and understatement; every slow-burn hard rock song of the late 60s and beyond squeezed into three-and-a-half peerless minutes.

WHAT JIMI MEANS TO ME

JOE SATRIANI

WHAT DID JIMI HENDRIX MEAN TO YOU AS A PLAYER?

"Jimi's heart and soul were evident on everything he played. This had the most profound effect on me as a young player. I still get the feeling that he surrendered himself to the music every time he performed. For Jimi, every song was a unique opportunity for expression, exploration and exposition. His skills as an improvisor were spellbinding, and convinced me as a young musician that that very skill had to be part of my life's pursuit."

WHAT DO YOU THINK HENDRIX BROUGHT TO THE GUITAR?

"He showed us that the electric guitar could be played with far more expressiveness than previously attempted. He innovated with his fingers, hands, and his whole mind and body on every song he played."

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE HENDRIX MOMENT, AND WHY?

"Every time someone asks me this question I find a new answer. The problem is I love all of Jimi's songs. For sheer groundbreaking electric guitar brilliance it has to be *Machine Gun* from the Band Of Gypsys' *Live At The Fillmore East*."

"But I can't ignore the magic captured on film at the Monterey Pop Festival, when Jimi introduces the Bob Dylan song *Like A Rolling Stone*, and then proceeds to reinvent it, elevate it, and destroy it, along with his guitar! His innocence, boldness, naivety, audacity, musicianship, showmanship, are all gloriously on display in this once-in-a- lifetime moment."

INTERVIEW: JASON SIDWELL

Newly Experienced: Hendrix in Nottingham, April 20, 1967

PHOTO FROM JIMI BY JANIE HENDRIX AND JOHN MCDERMOTT. PUBLISHED BY CHRONICLE CHROMA. TONY GALE/ © AUTHENTIC HENDRIX, LLC

IF SIX WAS NINE

Later included on the *Easy Rider* film soundtrack, this psychedelic blues was the 60s counterculture in excelsis, from Hendrix's pot shots at *'white collar conservatives flashing down the street'* to the likely influence of LSD ("I didn't find out until after we finished *Axis* that he'd been taking acid," confessed producer-manager Chas Chandler). A cameo from Graham Nash stomping his feet on the track bled into a free-form outro, with Hendrix tooting on a borrowed recorder. "So here's Jimi freaking out," engineer Eddie Kramer recalled, "and of course I stick a lot of echo on. And the guys are stomping away like mad. It sounds like galloping horses!"

The elaborate production was almost in vain, after Hendrix left the *Axis* master tape in a taxi. Redding saved the day by supplying an early mix on an arse-rough open-reel tape, and the bassist also took credit for the outro: "When we all go into three separate time signatures, that's basically an idea of mine, because we didn't know what to do at that one point in the song."

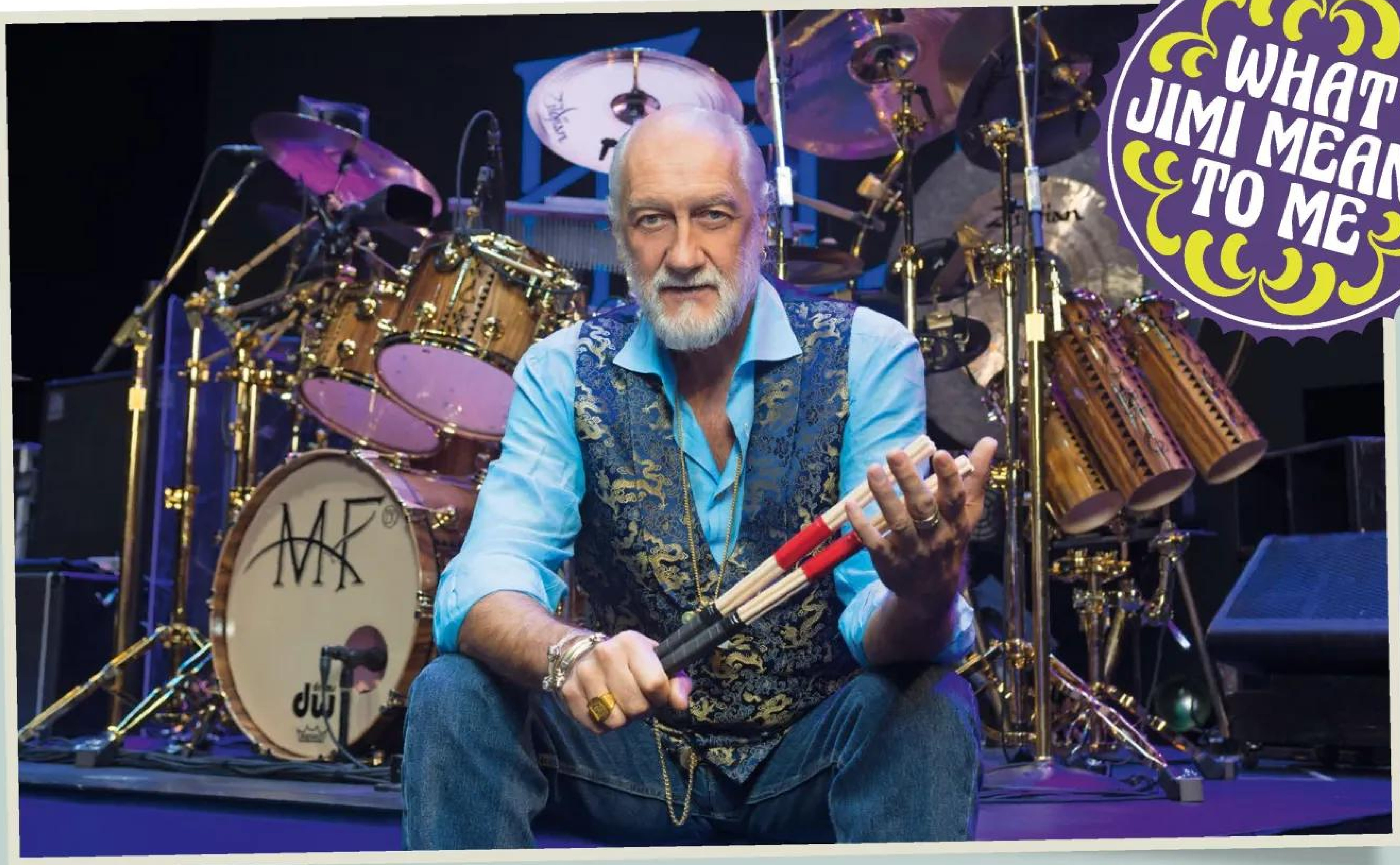
LITTLE WING

Eddie Kramer: "*Little Wing* has all of the essence of the great man in that one song. It's sensitive. It has beautiful dynamics. It has Jimi playing a glockenspiel, which he'd never played before. There was a huge table of instruments left over from a previous session, and literally in a couple of minutes he had it down, and all those beautiful bell sounds are him. Even though the amp was full up, the front part of the song is very quiet, because of his technique of using the volume control on his Strat. So when the solo comes in, it just soars. It's a piece of art."

If the languid guitar flourish that opens *Little Wing* sounded like it was rolling impulsively off Hendrix's fingers, in truth the musical roots were a little more tangled. In '66, channelling the rhythm playing of one-time tour-mate Curtis Mayfield, the journeyman guitarist had thrown similar shapes on *(My Girl) She's A Fox* during a spell with R&B duo The Icemen. That same year, after-hours loiterers on New York's Greenwich Village circuit might have heard those glistening trills resurface as Hendrix tinkered with the guitar part, honing the piano-style voicings that were possible only because his long thumb was able to reach over the neck to fret the low bass notes.

Post-fame, the lyric came faster, in a flash of inspiration at Monterey, as Hendrix imagined the festival's love-your-brother vibe personified into an *'angel came down from heaven'* ("I figured that I take everything around," he reflected, "and put it maybe in the form of a girl"). ▷

ALEX SOLCA



WHAT JIMI MEANS TO ME

MICK FLEETWOOD

DISCOVERING HENDRIX

"There was this strange sort of rumour that had started in London. 'Something is coming.' 'Have you heard about him?' 'He's like nothing on earth'. 'I can't explain what's gonna hit you'. Then we were all told about the show at the Bag O'Nails. Everyone tried to make it back from their various gigs, and if they weren't playing they were all down that club. I was there with Peter [Green], Eric [Clapton] was there, Pete Townshend, Jeff Beck. Next thing we know, this mysterious rumoured entity, known as the Jimi Hendrix Experience, jumped on to this tiny little stage, which was completely consumed with two stacks of Marshalls and Mitch's drum kit in the middle. All you can say is that everyone in that audience – especially guitar players – was sitting or standing with their mouths wide open."

PERSONAL MEMORIES

"I think maybe even before that Bag O'Nails gig, Fleetwood Mac was rehearsing in a basement off Oxford Street. Unannounced, [early Mac producer] Mike Vernon came down and he had obviously hooked up with this young man known as Jimi Hendrix. And with all deference to the rest of the boys in Fleetwood Mac, including me, he was there to see and hear Peter.

"He was the sweetest, shyest creature. But you could tell there was a sense of mystery and mischief. He reminded me of Brian Jones – really shy and yet… not. Brian didn't get a lot of credit. Jimi did. But they were both a very similar vibration.

"He didn't play guitar that day. But you knew instinctively there was a presence in the room. And he just sat and hung and spoke a little bit here and there, then drifted off. And we had just met Jimi.

"There were other instances. Later on, in New York, we were playing at Steve Paul's Scene club and Jimi came down, got up and jammed. I was being a bit of a worry wart. I remember hearing: 'We don't have a left-handed guitar.' And, idiot that I was, I'm going: 'What are we going to do?' And I remember Jimi saying: 'That doesn't matter.' And he proceeded to pick up one of Peter's spare guitars and play it the wrong way round.

"It was so extraordinary, the complete command of his instrument. You go: 'Well, how do you make a guitar do that? How's he making this shit happen?' And in the end it's the touch. Jimi could literally pick up a guitar and play it upside-down with all the strings round the wrong way. He was part of the guitar. When you witnessed Jimi play, it was a total implosion of soul, body, music, touch, and the guitar just happened to be a tool in the middle of all that. Seeing that in motion was literally like poetry."

WHAT HE MEANT TO ME

"One thing we learnt as young blues musicians is that if you're a support player – which a rhythm section is – it's important to catch the moment. The guys in the front are doing their shit, and you're setting the stage, so you're constantly listening and watching like a hawk. If you look at the Experience on stage, I just love the way that, like a teacher, Jimi conducted everything. Not only with his playing, but with body language and sign language, so Mitch and Noel could stay with him. He was a very kind player. He could fly into the stratosphere, but he would take the other players there with him. I always thought that was something I learnt from Peter as a player, and hopefully somewhat as a person. I get reminded of that [by Hendrix]. So that would be the lesson learnt. The kindness of the way he played, with everyone."

JIMI'S LEGACY

"How do I feel now when I see a T-shirt or poster with Jimi Hendrix on it? Well, the Irish sentimentality from my father's side of the family means I would go: 'What a crying shame.' The very sad loss of someone so talented… You felt duped that someone like that had left. That Jimi hadn't completed what you knew he should have. He was twenty-seven. What is it about that number? Jim Morrison. Janis Joplin. Kurt Cobain. There's about eight or more who all left when they were twenty-seven. And they were all meteorite-type talents in their various ways.

"I think you have to end up celebrating Jimi's music, and there's a lot of it that he left behind. Without any shadow of a doubt, he would still have been an extraordinary player. I think he'd have remained incredibly inventive. He was such an alchemist. I can't believe he wouldn't have been enthralled, even at eighty years old. I would say, one hundred per cent, our man, had he remained with us, would have been beautifully active and developed all sorts of gifts to hand down to us to enjoy."

INTERVIEW: HENRY YATES

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The Jimi Hendrix Experience at the cover shoot for debut album *Are You Experienced*, London, spring 1967: (l-r) bassist Noel Redding, Hendrix, drummer Mitch Mitchell.

WHAT JIMI MEANS TO ME

JOE BONAMASSA

HENDRIX AS A PLAYER?

"Jimi Hendrix meant the world to generations. He was the total package: player, showman and writer. As innovative and revolutionary as his playing was, it's the songs that stand the test of time. Great guitar playing needs a vehicle for it to do that. Jimi has great songs, period."

WHAT HE BROUGHT TO THE GUITAR?

"Jimi brought fire… He used his guitar as a weapon. Up until that point only Buddy Guy had weaponised the electric guitar. It was visceral and almost terrifying to listen to and watch as a young kid in his formative years. Beautiful tone, phrasing and use of chords. Game changer."

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE HENDRIX MOMENT, AND WHY?

"Jimi at Monterey. Black 1965 Fender Strat, a Marshall stack and a black-face Fender Showman amp, covering Bob Dylan's *Like A Rolling Stone*. A life-changing moment for those lucky enough to witness it in person, and life changing for me."

INTERVIEW: JASON SIDWELL

MAIN: BRUCE FLEMING/GETTY IMAGES

Even then, *Little Wing* could have turned out very differently. In an October 1967 session at Olympic, following on the heels of the hot-headed *Wait Until Tomorrow*, early passes were more rocking, but patently not the right treatment. Hendrix reconsidered, slowed the pace, and *Little Wing* became an ethereal masterpiece, decorated with a glockenspiel and a DIY Leslie speaker. "The 'Leslie' was a tiny, handmade thing," said Eddie Kramer, "with a little Meccano set to support it and a rubber band driving a motor."

The track is defined by the cascading guitar work, which covers by Stevie Ray Vaughan and Eric Clapton valiantly chased but never quite caught.

Of the Experience's three original albums, *Axis: Bold As Love* might be home to Hendrix's deeper cuts, but *Little Wing* remains a calling card.

MACHINE GUN

Kirk Hammett: "The version of *Machine Gun* on *Band Of Gypsys* is so atmospheric, it's so moody, it's so stoner- rock – even before stoner-rock existed – and virtuosic at the same time. He really brings you there, to the killing fields, and every time I hear that, the impending sense of doom he creates just blows me away. It's like Black Sabbath… if Black Sabbath was played by a bunch of very talented musicians from some other realm or galaxy."

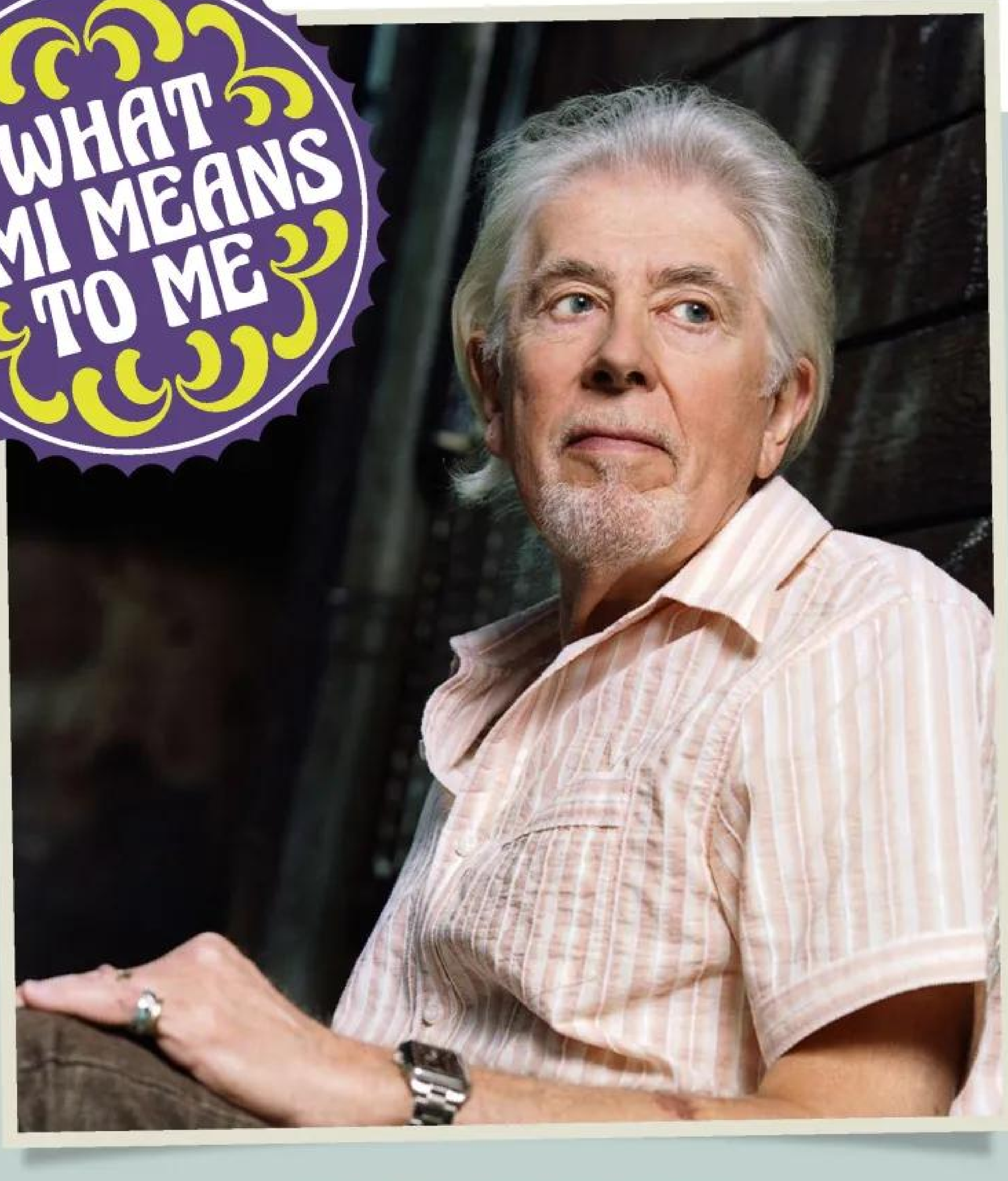
Historically an opaque lyricist, Hendrix left no doubt about the inspiration behind the Band Of Gypsys' high-water mark, dedicating it on stage at the mighty 1970 Fillmore East show to the soldiers in Vietnam (and those braving riots on home soil). Scuttling on muted strings and squalling over Buddy Miles's rat-a-tat drumming, *Machine Gun* was the most visceral of protest songs, catching the dread of war.

Joe Satriani: "Jimi's greatest song, without a doubt, is *Machine Gun* from the *Band Of Gypsys* live album, recorded at Filmore East in 1969/70. Let's just start from the top: it was improvised in front of an audience by a trio, and he's playing a Fender Stratocaster, a couple of pedals and three Marshall half-stacks. Anyone that's ever done a live album like that will know how you get butterflies in your stomach and sweaty hands just thinking about the anxiety of recording a live album that way. These days, everyone has a massive pedalboard and they know they can record it six times, plus options to overdub, retune or retighten it later. We're talkin' reality here…

"Then you have to think about the time it happened – there was all this political and social upheaval in the US and around the world. Then, an African American famous for playing with two British guys shows up with two other African Americans as a brand new band. They played a set that was so mind-blowing, and then came out with one song that rewrote electric guitar for everybody from that moment on. It was like him saying: 'This is the way you're going to do it from now on… This is the way it's going to be!' But he wasn't thinking that, it was innocent Jimi trying to make some beautiful music and a political point. He was twenty-seven years old and trying to do something unique.

"In that moment, he showed us how you can play rhythm, riff and melody at the same time, blending with a band and how to tie all these motifs together. Using the whammy bar to connect one section to another, playing around with major and minor in a third-generation electric blues context. Even if you forget about the wah-wah, Uni-Vibe and Octavia, what he did was ground-breaking. When I think about it now, I still can't believe it – almost like trying to fathom the people who built the pyramids or first railroad or the Wright brothers getting in the plane for the first time." ▷

WHAT JIMI MEANS TO ME



JOHN MAYALL

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"I first heard about Jimi in 1966 from Chas Chandler, who had left The Animals and was now in a managerial position with Mike Jeffreys. Chas had been telling everyone about this amazing guitarist he'd seen in New York. He told me he was so good that he was going to bring him to England and make a star of him.

"The show on November 25 at the Bag O'Nails club was more than a revelation. I was just glad that I wasn't a lead guitarist, because all the hotshots – Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, Pete Townshend and so on – were in a state of shock. The world now knows what Jimi sounds like, so you can only imagine what it was like to hear a guitarist of that intensity and originality for the first time.

"He did a few of the London clubs, and once the buzz got around, the top rock guitarists had to rethink their positions in the hierarchy. Jimi genuinely changed the course of rock'n'roll."

LOST RECORDING

"I'd bought a reel-to-reel tape recorder with a view to documenting all our gigs, and recorded over sixty hours of tape. These recordings included a slow blues recorded one night at the Speakeasy when Jimi came on stage and took over Mick Taylor's guitar. Unfortunately, only a brief moment was recorded, as we weren't allowed to acknowledge Jimi's performance for contractual reasons. It's tantalising to hear him play with the volume turned down to almost nothing."

OTHER SHOWS

"We played two shows on a bill with Jimi, Albert King and Soft Machine at the Winterland Ballroom in Los Angeles in February 1968. That whole hippie scene was an eye-opener for me. Flowers and good vibes abounded everywhere. The promoter Bill Graham was leading the way in putting Jimi on the map, and it was very impressive to see the way in which he had made his mark in America, just as he'd done in England.

"We played on a bill with him again at a very different show in Zurich, Switzerland in May 1968. It was in a huge, cycle-racing stadium. There were chairs being broken and fights and scuffles with the police going on while bands including Traffic and The Move were playing. Jimi was the big, headlining star of the show. He really was most impressive.

"Those were such exciting times going on back then. We were all in the same boat, but Jimi was just about the most exciting thing there was."

INTERVIEW: DAVID SINCLAIR

Royal performance: Hendrix at the Albert Hall, London, February 1969.

MANIC DEPRESSION

Robby Krieger: "Murray the K was a big DJ in New York at the time, and we [The Doors] were doing a video with him for *People Are Strange*, which was going to come out as a single. And he had took me up to his studio and said: 'Hey, I want you to hear something! There's this new guy, Jimi Hendrix, from London,' and he played me a couple of songs from the first album. It turned out my favourite one was *Manic Depression*.

"I played on a number of these Jimi Hendrix tours with Experience Hendrix, with all these guitar players together, and that was the one I liked to play. It's got that three-quarter time. It's different. That's why I like it, just the way Jimi came up with those lines."

After Chas Chandler criticised Hendrix's interview manner as "manic depressive", the guitarist had his title, even if the lyric seemed more to do with thwarted love than with mental health – '*I wish I could caress and kiss, kiss…*' With Mitchell's muscular jazz rolls high in the mix, Hendrix's riff climbing upward through the verses, and his vocal flowing across the 3/4 meter, *Manic Depression* seemed to have no centre of gravity – and was all the better for it. That seasick vibe probably prevented the track's promotion to being a single release from *Are You Experienced*, but Hollywood Vampires' 2015 cover was a reminder that the hard-core were listening.

PURPLE HAZE

Steve Hackett: I think *Purple Haze* is my favourite Hendrix song. It's a very cleverly written tune, and is full of unexpected twists. It defines the term 'psychedelic'. Both the angular guitar riff and the opening dissonant chords give you that feeling of Iron Man Cometh. But there's vulnerability too in the lyric, with the idea of confusion running through it. Although *Purple Haze* is a short song, Hendrix often played it live with extended moments which sometimes literally did 'kiss the sky', to quote the lyric.

"His impact on music was huge. A man who didn't need a light show. For me it was just enough to watch the alchemy of his fingers, his dexterity and the way he danced with his instrument."

Hendrix had complained that the Experience's debut single *Hey Joe* "wasn't us" (literally: it was a cover). Follow-up *Purple Haze* corrected that, with a brain-dump of Hendrix's myriad interests, from sci-fi to sex, and possibly psychedelics (he variously explained the inspiration as a dream of walking on the sea bed, and the "daze" of chasing an unattainable woman).

That first draft, the guitarist reflected, had sprawled to "a thousand words… I had it all written out". But Chas Chandler, eyeing radio, helped prune *Purple Haze* back to a more palatable three minutes – without sacrificing a lick of what (arguably) nudges *Voodoo Child* as Jimi's signature guitar moment. The opening two-note jolt (an unsettling tri-tone

MAIN PHOTO FROM JIMI BY JANIE HENDRIX AND JOHN MC DERMOTT, PUBLISHED BY CHRONICLE CHROMA. GRAHAM F. PAGE/ MOPOP/ AUTHENTIC HENDRIX, LLC; JOHN MAYALL: FABRICE DEMESSENCE/PRESS

HENDRIXOLOGY

Illuminating the musical mechanics of a guitar master.

Words: **Milton Mermikides**

Jimi Hendrix is rightfully acclaimed as one of the most inventive, influential and creative electric guitarists in history. In his tragically short career he greatly expanded the possibilities of the instrument and left an indelible print on how the guitar – and its technologies – is played to this day.

However, despite this almost mythological aura around his playing, there is relatively little deep analysis of his musical mechanics. Which is a wasted opportunity, as he is a supremely interesting guitarist in terms of harmony, fretboard strategies, articulation, timbre and rhythm. He was also deeply interested in all types of music. He adored and drew influence from blues, funk, folk, Western classical music, jazz, Indian classical music and soul, as well as his contemporaries in the rock sphere.

Ironically Hendrix's other-worldliness came from embracing, without prejudice, the music of the world. He was also diffident and humble about compliments on his musicianship, and thirsty for musical knowledge, taking lessons on harmony from Miles Davis – he is quoted as saying in an interview that he wanted to take a break from his career to attend music school, learn to read music, and "study and think".

In the spirit of this endless curiosity, I've taken three iconic Hendrix tracks (one from each of his three studio albums *Are You Experienced, Axis: Bold As Love* and *Electric Ladyland* respectively) to have a look at, and illuminated some of his brilliant guitaristic and musical ideas, using some contemporary analytical approaches.

PURPLE HAZE

This track is a great example of Jimi's sophisticated and inventive use of harmony and dissonance. To appreciate this there are some fundamental concepts to understand about harmony.

1. Tonality. There is a 'centre of gravity' in pitches and chords, some more unstable than others and there is one – the tonic note (and the tonic or 'I' chord) – that feels most like 'home' around which the other notes and chords circulate.
2. In tonal music, keys are typically either clearly in major (which includes a major third) or minor (which includes a minor third).
3. Intervals – the relationship between notes – are variously consonant (think 'settled' or 'smooth') and dissonant (think 'scrunchy'). Dissonance tends to occur away and leading to the tonic chord, where there is typically more consonance.

Purple Haze twists and subverts these norms in several ways. It is clearly tonal – in the key of E – but that tonic note is given a constant delicious dissonance. The introduction plays repeated Es against Bbs. E and Bb create a tritone interval. The tritone can be a particularly dissonant interval. Despite the common myth, it wasn't ever banned from music making, and here Jimi embraces the dissonance repeatedly and directly.

Jimi's love of dissonance is also clear in his use of the 'Hendrix chord'. This chord (in this case E G# D and G) is often shorthanded as a 7#9 (dominant 7 sharp 9) and is extraordinarily rich despite just having four notes. It contains the two spiciest intervals: a tritone between G# and D, and a semitone clash between G and G#. It also contains both a major and minor third. Jimi repeatedly uses this chord as the tonic 'home' chord, and so there is a bittersweet angular flavour to the entire track. This major-minor ambiguity is also evident; it intermingles chords (and scales) from the key of E minor and E major.

LITTLE WING

While guitar duties are often separated into 'lead' and 'rhythm' roles, Jimi was a master and innovator in the 'chord-melody' approach, where both are effectively performed simultaneously.

Inspired by the playing of soul and jazz guitarists like Curtis Mayfield and Wes Montgomery, Jimi developed this approach into a beautiful signature style. While he used this in some form on every one of his recordings, *Little Wing* (see also *The Wind Cries Mary, Castles Made Of Sand, Wait Until Tomorrow, Bold As Love* and the sublime *Angel*) is a celebrated example.

Jimi's chord melody style relies on two skills: the ability to play any chord (major, minor or dominant 7) not as a single fixed-position object, but in any position on the fretboard; and the ability to embellish these forms with small (two to three-note) chordal elaborations. *Little Wing* is a beautiful progression of major and minor chords, and these skills allow them to be treated with a harmonic fluidity, providing both harmonic support to the vocals and lead guitar but with an engaging melodic improvisational freedom.

Figure 2 (below) compares the concept of 'G' from the perspective of a normative 'strummer' to Jimi's sophisticated and expressive all-fretboard vision (for the benefit of most readers this has been presented for right-handed players). Jimi would play these chords with melodic and harmonic colourations (usually 9ths, 6ths and 4ths) as 'extensions' to the chord, or used with slurs and slides for melodies in two- and three-note mini-chords and to connect up positions. Of course, he could transpose this to play over any root of the major chord, and had similarly elegant structures for minor chords and blues contexts.

Also embedded in *Little Wing* (and missing from most transcriptions and performances) is Jimi's mastery of rhythmic swing.

VOODOO CHILD (SLIGHT RETURN)

In most music theory an emphasis is placed on pitch (scale, melody and harmony) and rhythm (meter, syncopation, phrasing). And in *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)* there is much to say about the use of major-minor ambiguity, the 'Hendrix chord', micro-tonal bends, call and response, and a light semiquaver swing feel. However, an underlooked form of musical expression is timbre – i.e. the tonal quality of a sound. While guitarists can be obsessed with tone, it is often equated to 'having a pleasing sound'; an attractive 'serving plate' for the melodic 'food'. Jimi, however, shows that timbre can be used as a distinct and central form of musical expression, whatever the pitches used. While timbre is multi-dimensional and endlessly complex, even a simple consideration can be very useful, and reveal patterns in Jimi's playing.

Let's look at resonance, which we will define here as the amount of high frequency versus low frequency content – it's the quality of brightness versus mellowness in a sound. Jimi manipulated this extensively by plectrum attack, playing muted strings (on their own or together with played notes). He combined such techniques with the use of his pickup selector switch (with five varying timbres from mellow to bright), fuzz pedal and of course wah-wah pedal, which provides a continuous foot-controlled level of resonance.

Voodoo Child uses an inventive combination of playing approaches and technological manipulation. Jimi would also leave a characteristic resonance in place (for example, by pushing the wah-wah pedal to its brightest level and leaving it there) to colour an entire section. An illustration of some of his strategies with the wah-wah pedal are shown in Figure 3 (below). Such techniques – in combination with Jimi's fretboard knowledge, rhythmic feel and harmonic invention – go some way to revealing his enduring influence and legacy.

Fig 1
The 'Hendrix' Chord as used in *Purple Haze*

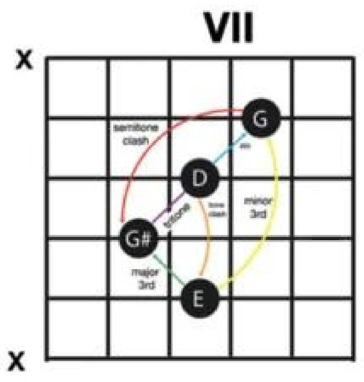


Fig 2
G Chord Variations

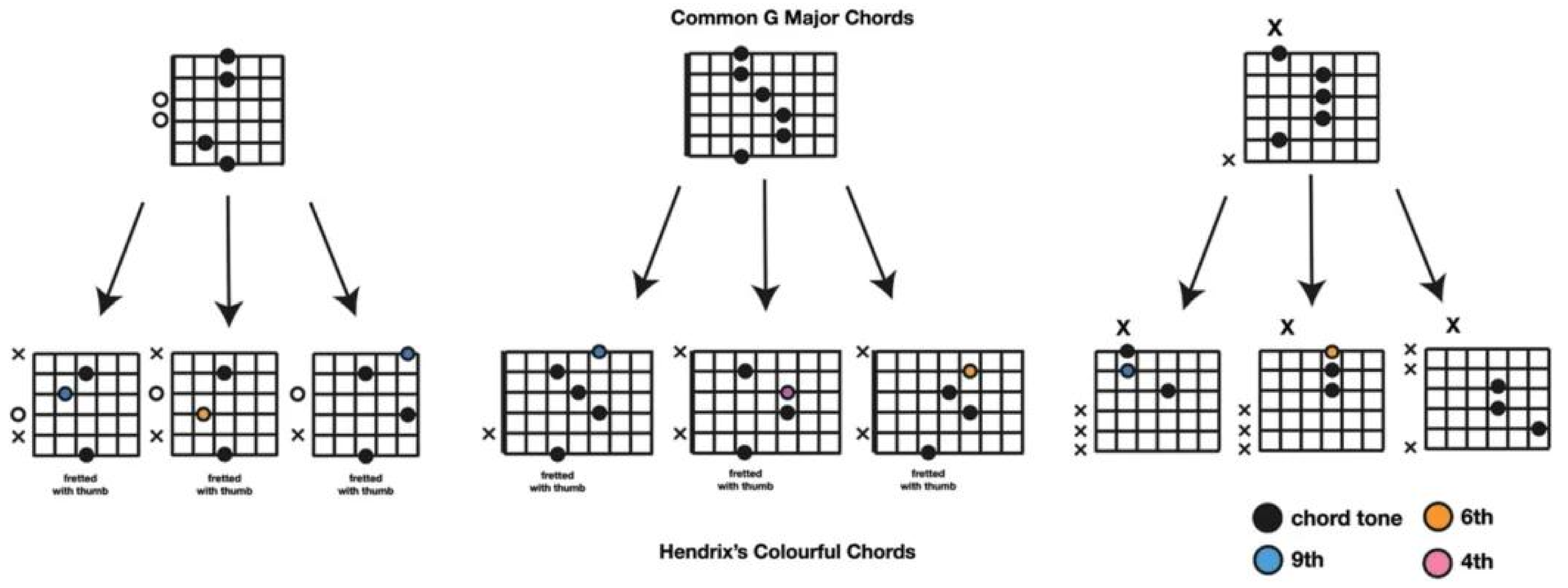
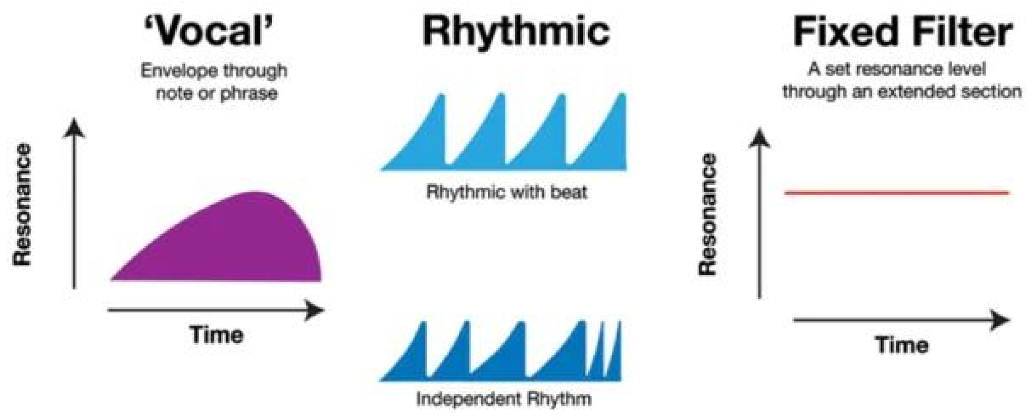


Fig 3
Jimi's Wah-Wah Strategies



interval rightly nicknamed 'the devil in music') and three-chord verse might have been a basic canvas, but with his frighteningly adept lead – taken to the stars by revolutionary use of Roger Mayer's Octavia pedal – Hendrix announced himself beyond question as the virtuoso and sonic adventurer to beat.

If you Google 'the new Hendrix', the top result refers to Gary Clark Jr., and the Austin bluesman is quick to recognise the influence: "When I heard *Purple Haze*, I knew that was my thing".

Steve Harley: "I was with Jimi all the way through his career, right from the beginning, including being at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970, which was his second-to-last live performance. He was bitterly disappointing that day, he'd fallen asleep backstage and they [the Band Of Gypsies] went on very late and played a set of slow blues. That's not the way I'd like to remember him.

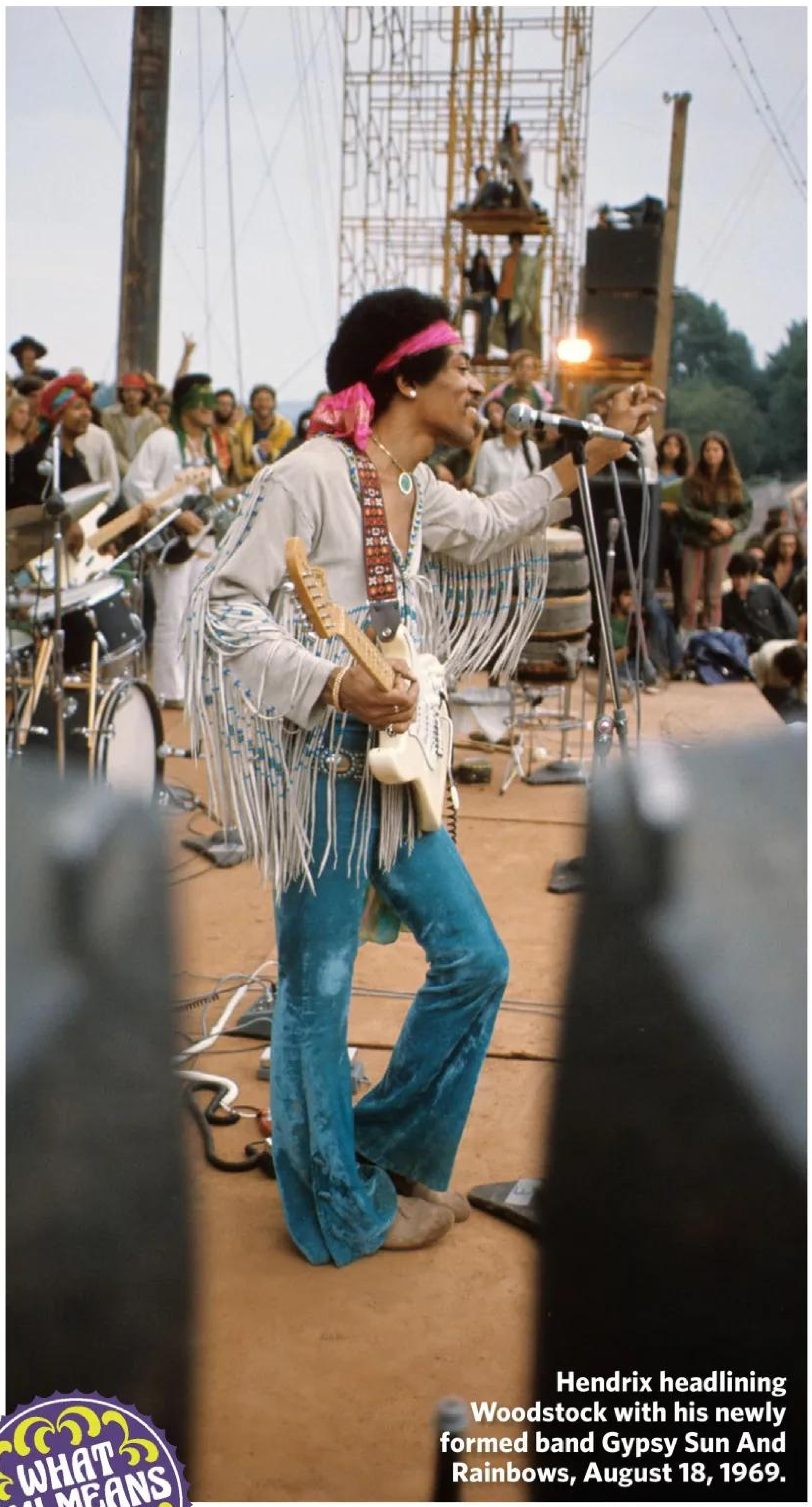
"As a performer, Hendrix was mesmerising, an ex-American squaddie, he came from another place entirely. There are not many of those artists… I think of Bob Dylan, McCartney and Lennon together, Paul Simon, Neil Young to a degree and Joni [Mitchell], they all came from that special place. The creativity of the names I just mentioned is hard to quantify. And Jimi was undoubtedly one of those. If you put a gun to my head and asked me to choose a single song of his, I'll say *Purple Haze*. It's an obvious choice, but no apologies."

RED HOUSE

At first glance, *Red House* hardly squared with Jimi's iconoclast reputation. Three tracks into *Are You Experienced*, it set out its stall as a no-frills slow blues, following 12-bar dogma at trudging pace, skirting plagiarism of Albert King's *Travelin' To California*. But at the two-minute mark – *'That's alright, I still got my guitar, look out now!'* – Hendrix elevated the track with a solo of such unadorned beauty that it equalled anything in his bag of tricks. It was so good, noted John Lee Hooker, that it would make you "grab your mother and choke her".

"The beauty of Jimi," says Lamb Of God's Mark Morton, "is that he was so strongly rooted in the blues but he had a very innovative approach to playing the guitar." It is impossible to imagine the modern electric blues scene without Hendrix. But this song's influence is not limited to that – it's been covered by Imagine Dragons and Prince.

Eddie Kramer: "Something happened to Jimi's songs when he played them live. For me, there's a couple of standouts on the new live album [*Los Angeles Forum, April 26, 1969*]. Just putting up the faders and listening to the performance – wow. For me, that show has one of the best *Red Houses* I've ever heard. The dynamics, the exploration, the wah-wah, the way it goes so soft you can hear conversation in the audience. It's breathtaking."



Hendrix headlining Woodstock with his newly formed band Gypsy Sun And Rainbows, August 18, 1969.

WHAT JIMI MEANS TO ME

STEVE LUKATHER

WHAT DID JIMI HENDRIX MEAN TO YOU AS A PLAYER?

"It was the aftershock of The Beatles changing the world, then an alien landed on our planet to give, those that understood, the truth. All that before he was twenty-seven years old."

WHAT DO YOU THINK HENDRIX BROUGHT TO THE GUITAR?

"A total reinvention of the possibilities. He could make a statement with his use of feedback, and amazing use of chords and R&B stylings which he made his own. Very loudly! It's like nothing else. I'm not sure anyone could make an impact like that afterwards. EVH did but he was not on a cultural level, because Jimi was part of the sixties anti-establishment scene. Black man with a white band, accepted by everyone. But I never saw colour, just the sound. It was a colossal sound; the anger and intensity of *Machine Gun* through to the softness of *The Wind Cries Mary*. Goodness knows what he could have gone on to have done."

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE HENDRIX MOMENT, AND WHY?

Impossible. They are all a huge part of my growing up. Kids today might not 'get it', but remember this was 1966! *Nothing* like it had happened before, or indeed after it."

INTERVIEW: JASON SIDWELL

THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

On the morning of August 18, 1969, Jimi played Woodstock with his short-lived ensemble Gypsy Sun And Rainbows. Towards the end of the set, he dropped in an overdriven, distorted and generally fucked-up version of the hallowed US national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Conservatives and patriots instantly claimed it was wholly inappropriate and offensive, and caused them to wretch into their own hands, while others believed it to be a noisy statement against the Vietnam War. So what's the answer? Well, it's said that by the time Hendrix took to the stage that morning he'd been awake for three consecutive days. So the answer is anyone's guess, really.

Greta Van Fleet guitarist Jim Kiszka had his life changed after learning this tune in school: "I remember tearing up because it was so emotional, so for the next three years I was obsessed with Hendrix – meticulously trying to figure out what he was doing."

STONE FREE

Glenn Hughes: "Back in the mid-1960s I was a guitarist before I took up the bass, and my two main sources of inspiration were Hendrix and Cream. I was more in the Jimi camp because his swagger and groove captured me.

"The track that encapsulated my appreciation of Jimi was *Stone Free*. I used to play it when I was very young and in a tribute band. Its distinctive groove and swagger became a blueprint for my own songwriting. Those two qualities are very important for me. People tend to forget what a great vocalist he was too – I still find it hard to believe he felt he couldn't sing. Back then there was nobody emulating Jimi, nobody even came close. What he did was so pure, it might have come from another dimension."

THE WIND CRIES MARY

The gossamer lilt of the Experience's third single, according to Hendrix's then-girlfriend Kathy Etchingham (middle name Mary), was at odds with its volatile inspiration, a repentant Hendrix writing it by way of apology after a blow-up over mashed potatoes: "He tastes them with a fork and says they're all lumpy. That's how the argument started."

The January '67 session at London's De

PHOTO FROM JIMI BY JANIE HENDRIX AND JOHN MC DERMOTT. PUBLISHED BY CHRONICLE CHROMA. ALLAN KOSS / © AUTHENTIC HENDRIX, LLC

Lane Lea studios moved fast, remembered Jimi's manager/producer Chas Chandler – just 20 minutes to play through with Mitchell and Redding, plus overdubs, but you'd never guess it. While London shook with blues scales, Hendrix's jazzy three-chord shift at the end of the chorus sounded impossibly sophisticated.

VOODOO CHILD (SLIGHT RETURN)

Bruce Dickinson: "My favourite all-time song of Jimi's would have to be *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*. Because it's fantastic, and also because it was the first time I'd heard an electric guitar made to sound like that. I first heard it at school, on vinyl on a record player in the sixth-form common room with a load of mates. It was very important moment in my life."

The wah-wah guitar pedal was a relatively new invention when Hendrix used it to devastating effect on the unforgettable introduction of *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*. And while that intro is the track's most memorable feature, Hendrix treats the entire composition as a vehicle for expression. He alternates between rhythm and lead playing in the blink of an eye, and both riffs and solos frequently pan from left to right to add to the swaying, hypnotic nature of the performance. His guitar parts are backed up by the solid, unwavering playing of bassist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell, who allow him the breathing space he needs in order to take the dynamics down and up.

Released in a format somewhere between a single and an EP, *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)* was backed with *Hey Joe* and Hendrix's immortal cover of Bob Dylan's *All Along The Watchtower*. *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)* remains another reason for Hendrix's reputation as a man for whom a guitar was not simply an instrument. As his devotees believe, his iconic Fender Stratocaster was a vehicle for the expression of his essential soul.

Kenny Wayne Shepherd: "My favourite guitar song of all-time – the biggest guitar anthem ever written – is *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*. When I put my own band together at the age of sixteen, that would always be the last song of show.

"There's that bend on the second fret of the G string, and he'd flip through the different pickup positions… It just sounds like someone dropping bombs, and planes flying by. It's so crazy! And that's a sound he created. Supposedly he was trying to actually recreate the sounds he heard jumping out of planes when he was in the air force. It's such a powerful way of bending and making his instrument sound otherworldly." ▷

WILL IRELAND

WHAT JIMI MEANS TO ME

EDDIE KRAMER

DISCOVERING HENDRIX

"We all know the story: Chas brings him to London, they search for musicians, and it's Mitch and Noel. Then they go to Paris and do their first gigs there, and it's brilliant, of course. And we'd look at *Melody Maker* or *NME*, and we'd hear about this new guy. You'd hear the rumours through the industry: 'You gotta hear him.' The stories were legion. This guy turned the whole guitar playing world on its ear."

PERSONAL MEMORIES

"Olympic Studios had moved to Hammersmith, and in late-January of 1967, I got the call from front desk. Anna Menzies, who ran the studio, said: 'Eddie, there's this American chappy with the big hair. You do all that weird shit anyway, so why don't you do him?' So that's how I got to do Hendrix.

"I remember seeing him walk into the studio, sit in the corner, huddled up in a raincoat. Didn't say a bloody word. I'm running around like a blue-arsed fly trying to set up the amps. Jimi gets up and takes his coat off, puts on the guitar, plugs in. I must be standing maybe six feet away. He hits a chord, and it's a sound that I'll never forget. Imprinted on my brain cells. It hit you like an asteroid.

"The first memory I go to with James Marshall Hendrix is his sense of humour. He was one of the funniest human beings on earth. If things were going downhill in the studio, he'd flip to playing the Batman theme or a showtune. And the band would jump on it right away. He would hit a chord and he would be serious, and then he'd give that sly [wink]. He knew he was winding you up. One of these days I'd like to put together all the out-takes. We were serious about the music, but we were laughing all the time.

"Watching Hendrix work, you could almost sense the neurons moving at a million miles an hour, from the brain all the way through his body, through his hands and fingers, right up to the guitar at the end. We would set up three big screens in the studio because nobody could see him sing. He couldn't stand the sound of his voice. He hated it. So we'd turn all the lights down and he'd poke his head around the screens and ask: 'Was that alright?' I'd say: 'Yeah, it's great, Jimi.' And he'd say: 'I'm going to do it again.' Same thing with guitar solos. They would just pour out of him and they were bloody marvellous… And then he would do them again!

"I was there when Jimi played the Saville Theatre in June 1967. He knew The Beatles were going to be in the audience, and he'd got an advance copy of *Sgt. Pepper's*. I remember going up the back stairs to see Jimi and the boys. He was sitting in the corner and he's got this tiny little Philips record player. He's playing the opening song of *Sgt Pepper's*, he's got the guitar in his hand and he's looking at the guys saying: 'It goes like this.' They rehearsed it for about five minutes. Then they run downstairs, jump on stage and open with that song. Everybody in the audience is flabbergasted."

MY FAVOURITE HENDRIX DEEP CUT

"I liked some of the later stuff, like *Dolly Dagger*. I remember how much his girlfriend [Devon Wilson] was part of that song, and I'd never seen her in the control room so many times. And she was very sweet. A troubled human, unfortunately. And Jimi wrote this about her drug addiction. So there was the fun side and the dark side."

AS AN INSPIRATION/WHAT HENDRIX MEANT TO ME

"Jimi absolutely left his mark on me. I think one of the most important things I learnt through working with Jimi was to capture a live performance in the studio and help the musicians feel like they're creating something live, not computerised. There was this whole concept of going into a room, figuring out a song – and maybe they had rehearsed it up to a point – then they'd nail it within a couple of hours. I mean, we would get a couple of songs a night. Today, this whole idea of perfection drives me nuts. I think Jimi would have hated most aspects of modern recording technology."

JIMI'S LEGACY

"You had no idea that you were recording history in the moment. You knew the guy was a genius, and you just happened to be there and part of the creative process. [That he died so young], that's the unfortunate part of the history. But the fact that he was with us for those four years and created all that wonderful music… and it still lives. It's a living, breathing thing.

"Jimi could have become an elder statesman, with maybe his own film company, his own publishing company, still making music, working with young artists. He would have embraced rap and hip-hop – all that would have become a little part of what he created, because he absorbed music like a sponge. If you listen to the albums, from *Are You Experienced*, to *Axis*, to *Electric Ladyland*, they're on a steep curve, and you can hear the music shift and change. And what about *Band Of Gypsys*? That was a radical departure – but what a great one. I can imagine him as an eighty-year-old."

INTERVIEW: HENRY YATES

Hendrix at the Newport Pop Festival, Northridge, California, June 22, 1969.

ED CARAEFF / ICONIC IMAGES

WHAT JIMI MEANS TO ME

STEVE HACKETT

WHAT DID JIMI MEAN TO YOU AS A PLAYER?

"Initially I thought he came across with a rare animal power. But when you look more closely, his lyrics are full of poetry. Sometimes the words are very dark, with lots of references to imminent death and allusions to the next world. His showmanship seemed to come naturally to him. No one ever moved as gracefully with the guitar in hand. I feel it was his fluidity, as well as his innovation and risk-taking, that impressed and influenced me. His playing was heady stuff for me as an aspiring teenage rocker."

WHAT DO YOU THINK HENDRIX BROUGHT TO THE GUITAR?

"Hendrix was a bluesman with a very big difference. I knew his guitar tech, Eric Barrett, who said that Jimi played through feedback constantly, like a weapon permanently set on stun. The spacecraft aspect of his playing was hugely inspiring. He was always going to take you on a trip to some uncharted part of the universe. His playing skirts the limits of earthly experience. It's virtually a shamanic inner journey. He also brought many production ideas to the guitar. Somehow you feel that at Woodstock he was trying to register his protest at the falling bombs on Vietnam, managing to say as much with his guitar as other protest songs had done with words."

INTERVIEW: JASON SIDWELL

VOODOO CHILE

It would never be as celebrated as its (almost) same-named offshoot, but amid the wild experimentation of *Electric Ladyland, Voodoo Chile* was a reminder that few could touch Hendrix on a route-one blues. Nodding hard to Muddy Waters's *Rollin' Blues* and *Hoochie Coochie Man* – with a stir of sci-fi to boot – the structure was secondary to the vibe, with Hendrix corralling Hammond player Steve Winwood and bassist Jack Casady for a free-form 15-minute take that remains one of the quintessential wee-small-hours 60s studio jams. "There were no chord sheets, no nothing," Winwood recalled. "He just started playing."

WILD THING

Mick Fleetwood: "I loved the cheekiness when Jimi did *Wild Thing*. And the reason I have a soft spot for that song is that it meant that he wasn't a snob. I always loved The Troggs. I used to tell everyone: 'No, they're really good.' But there was a little snobby thing in the musical circles that we might have been in, like: 'What are you talking about?' So when Hendrix did *Wild Thing*, I was going: 'See, I told you so'."

1983... (A MERMAN I SHOULD TURN TO BE)

By spring 1968, *Electric Ladyland* had suffered its first casualty, with Chas Chandler quitting over Hendrix's obsessive attention to detail and habit of inviting the flotsam of the New York club scene back to the studio. With the brakes off, *1983…(A Merman I Should Turn To Be)* Hendrix dived deeper on a 13-minute psychedelic epic that sprawls between the backwards flute of Traffic's Chris Wood, seagull squawks created with microphone feedback, and amphibious lyrics that spoke of escaping the *'fighting nest'* and *'screaming pain'* of dry land.

It was hard to disagree with producer Eddie Kramer's assessment that "when Chas left, we were off to the races". According to Kramer, Jimi could record backwards guitar with an uncanny ability to know how it would sound, a skill strongly in evidence here.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience Los Angeles Forum: April 26, 1969 album is out now 2LP vinyl, CD and all digital platforms. Images in this feature taken from JIMI by Janie Hendrix and John McDermott (Chronicle Chroma, £40) available from all good booksellers. Used with permission.

The Soundtrack Of My Life

Steel Panther guitarist ***Satchel*** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Henry Yates**

DIO: GENE KIRKLAND/PRESS

On their 2009 debut album *Feel The Steel*, LA parody-metallers Steel Panther prowled into contention with a fistful of Sunset Strip riffs and #MeToo-baiting tales of Asian hookers and oral sex. Six albums later, the joke still hasn't worn thin, thanks to the band's deadly serious musicianship and, as guitarist Satchel reminds us, an appreciation for the giants of metal.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

My parents didn't crank up music around the house. I got turned on to music by friends who had older brothers that were not afraid to smoke pot in front of them. They would say: "Hey, go into the closet, turn all the lights off and listen to *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*." So we would listen to Black Sabbath in the closet until we got so scared we would run out.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

We got into devil music early on. But ironically, my first gig was at a church. The first one would have been a Stryper song. I remember nobody listening and everybody saying: "What is this racket?" But we turned it up as loud as we could and that became the whole goal, just to be as loud as possible.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

I'm gonna go with Queensrÿche's *Operation: Mindcrime*. You can drive and make love to that album at the same time. And I highly recommend it. Make sure that it's a girl, though, not an animal, because animals get crazy in the car.

MY ADOLESCENT ALBUM

When I put on *Screaming For Vengeance*, that'll bring me back to the eighties. I was a rebellious teenager. I was not only looking to fuck every girl in my neighbourhood and school, but I probably fucked all of the fur coats in my mom's closet and every pair of socks in my sock drawer.

THE GUITAR HERO

Ritchie Blackmore had so many great songs and his solos were ridiculous. *Man On The Silver Mountain. Since You Been Gone. Pictures Of Home*. Even the ones you hear all the time, like *Highway Star*. Everybody covers that one, but it's still awesome.

THE SINGER

Dio is definitely at the top somewhere. I love everything on *Mob Rules* and *Holy Diver. Invisible, Straight Through The Heart, Don't Talk To Strangers*…. Dio never phoned it in. Like Rob Halford, he could scream and hit amazing stuff up high, but they both had this really delicate voice that was just beautiful.

THE SONGWRITER

There are certain bands I love where you know there was a primary songwriter. Then there's bands like Led Zeppelin where I know Jimmy Page wrote a lot of the stuff but the contributions by the other guys were undeniable. It would never have sounded the same without what John Bonham, Robert Plant and John Paul Jones did. So many good songwriters in that band. Hearing *Led Zeppelin II* really affected me.

THE WORST MUSIC I'VE EVER HEARD

Recently we went to Japan and I had a day to kill. I was trapped in my hotel room and somebody told me (South Korean boy band) BTS had sold out the Raiders stadium where I live in Vegas. I was like: "No fucking way can this be happening – and why?" I had to figure it out. So I listened to two songs. It was the worst fucking shit I've ever heard in my life.

THE ALBUM THAT TAUGHT ME GUITAR

I started off with AC/DC – *Highway To Hell* and *Back In Black* – because it seemed easier. It didn't dawn on me until later that AC/DC's stuff sounds simple but playing it good is a whole other thing. Malcolm Young had more influence on guitar players than anybody else on the planet. Especially when you think about how little attention he got. He just hung out by the drums back there, just killing it.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

Steel Panther. We are definitely the hardest-working band out there and we don't get nearly as much pussy as we should. We get a lot of pussy, but we should be getting all the pussy.

THE RIFF THAT STARTED IT ALL

Before I got into learning guitar, I remember hearing *Smoke On The Water*. That's such an awesome riff but it wasn't until later that I realised it was Ritchie Blackmore and Jon Lord together that made it sound so big.

MY 'IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE' SONG

You can't go wrong with Motown. You know, Marvin Gaye – you put that on and girls go: "Oh, it's time to have sex." I put on Marvin Gaye the other day when my mom was over, and she started taking her clothes off, and I'm like, "Mom…!"

THE BEST LIVE ALBUM

Maiden Japan was one of the first cassettes I ever bought as a kid. The playing is great. The singing is great. One thing I've noticed about going to see Iron Maiden is that everybody sings along because the songs are so great – but nobody can hit the high choruses. Bruce points the mic at the crowd, but everybody kinda points back at him and goes: "I can't do that!"

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

I'd like to have Steel Panther songs played at my funeral, because they're pretty lighthearted and I don't want to have a depressing funeral. So I hope they play *Gloryhole* really loud.

Steel Panther's On The Prowl is out now.

"Dio could scream, but also had this really delicate voice that was just beautiful."

TINA TURNER

November 26, 1939 – May 24, 2023

From a cotton-picking child, through years of physical abuse at the hands of her husband, her talent and determination saw her rise to become one of the greatest ever music stars, the Queen Of Rock'N'Roll, simply the best.

Words: **David Sinclair**

Tina Turner defined the role of the female rock star and took it to stratospheric heights. Blessed with a strong, soulful singing voice and phenomenal reserves of energy, she was a performer with a smart, sophisticated sheen underpinned by raw, animal magnetism. Her 1984 album *Private Dancer* sold more than 12 million copies worldwide – a tally matched by only two other albums released by women up to that point (*Like A Virgin* by Madonna and *She's So Unusual* by Cyndi Lauper). Turner's show at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro in January 1988 in front of 180,000 fans earned her a place in the *Guinness Book Of World Records* for the largest audience ever assembled (at the time) by any performer, male or female, for a ticketed musical event. Turner was then 48 and close to the peak of her powers: a star of MTV, a member of the Live Aid rock aristocracy, a global stadium-rock phenomenon, and a household name. She was simply the biggest, as well as the best.

When I met her in London in June 1987, she had acquired an appropriate grandeur but was nevertheless a somewhat nervous and tightly strung object of scrutiny as she navigated her way through an afternoon of interviews with various international journalists, ending with an appearance on Terry Wogan's show at BBC Television Centre. Smaller than you would think (5'4") and immaculately dressed in a simple but stunning skirt and top, she spoke quietly but firmly.

Her autobiography, *I, Tina*, written with Kurt Loder and published the year before, was by then an international best-seller. The book had lifted the lid on the years of physical and emotional abuse she had suffered at the hands of her former husband and musical collaborator Ike Turner. Her status as a fully qualified survivor had turned her into a symbol of female empowerment. Not only had she broken free of her tormentor, but she had also gone on, loudly and proudly, to eclipse in her own right all of her past achievements with Ike.

But her newly forged credentials as a feminist icon had not affected her style as one of the most instinctively sexy performers ever to embark on a career in showbusiness. Her long legs, short/slit skirts, plunging necklines and surreal bouffants enhanced an air of hyper-sexuality that she affected to be blithely unaware of.

"Now listen to me very carefully," she told me in a low, steady voice that left little room for further discussion. "I have nothing to do with the labels people put on me. I was never promoting any cause. I was living my life. As for those dresses, I wore them then, I wear them now, because they're practical for the work I do and the way I'm built; they're just my style. They're nothing to do with anything that I thought or did. I'm not for any 'movement'. I don't want that responsibility. I'm just living my life." ⊳

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT / GETTY

A star turn: Tina Turner, London, November 1972.

All smiles in London in October 1975.

A portrait in 1964, when she was half of the husband-and-wife R&B duo Ike & Tina Turner.

And what a life it was. She was born Anna Mae Bullock in Nutbush, near Brownsville, Tennessee, the location immortalised in the 1973 hit *Nutbush City Limits* – one of the comparatively few songs that she wrote herself. '*Church house, gin house, school house, outhouse… You go to store on Fridays, you go to church on Sundays.*' Her father was a sharecropper, and as a little girl she picked cotton and sang in the choir of her local Baptist church. When she was 11, her mother ran off to St Louis, Missouri to escape her husband's abusive behaviour. Little Ann, as she was known, and her elder sister Alline eventually followed their mother to St Louis, where the two sisters would frequent the local R&B clubs.

Little Ann was 17 in 1957 when she first saw Ike Turner on stage at the Club Manhattan with his band the Kings Of Rhythm. He was 26 and already an established figure in the music business; a guitarist, pianist, songwriter, producer and the man behind Jackie Brenston's 1951 single *Rocket 88*, which is often referred to as "the first rock'n'roll record". She became a regular at Ike's shows and dreamed of being a singer with his band. One night, during the intermission, she grabbed the microphone and started singing BB King's *You Know I Love You*. Ike (and the audience) was suitably impressed, and her moment of bravado marked the beginning of a long and explosive partnership.

Ike changed Little Ann's name to Tina – inspired by the popular TV series *Sheena, Queen Of The Jungle* – and encouraged her to develop a wild, uninhibited stage personality similar to that of the cartoon character. In 1960 they released their first single as Ike & Tina Turner, the gospel-tinged R&B song *A Fool In Love*, which found Tina testifying: '*I trust the man and all that he do*' (it was Ike's lyric). The song was a substantial hit on the R&B chart, and became one of the first records to cross over into the mainstream US pop chart, where it reached No.27. A string of hits followed including *Its Gonna Work Out Fine, Poor Fool* and others, prompting Ike to re-brand his live show as the Ike & Tina Turner Revue and, with a trio of female backing singers/dancers known as the Ikettes, to embark on a never-ending schedule of touring and recording.

"I have nothing to do with the labels people put on me. I was never promoting any cause."

Tina Turner

Tina was already the mother of Ike's son Ronnie (b.1960), and the mother of another son Craig (b.1958) by the Kings Of Rhythm saxophonist Raymond Hill when in 1962 Ike and Tina were married in a registry office in Tijuana. Love did not have a lot to do with it. After the papers were signed, Ike took his new wife to a brothel where the floor show was "more gynaecological than erotic" as a mortified Tina described it in her 2018 memoir *My Love Story*.

There is some amazing footage from this early period now available on YouTube and elsewhere of the Ike & Tina Turner Revue performing on stage and in TV studios in America. But very little if any of it reached UK TV screens at the time. One memorable introduction to Tina's unique performing style was through the evocative writing of Nik Cohn, whose account of a show in London stood out among the many brilliant pieces in his epochal 1969 book *Awopbopaloobop Alopbamboom*: "She's a great big woman with long black hair right down her back and a beautiful snarling animal face and a truly cosmic arse. Not pretty but sexual as hell. All this time, Ike Turner, her husband, plays guitar

GETTY x3

Giving her all in a recording session circa 1969.

Tina and husband Ike performing with the Ike & Tina Turner Revue in 1976.

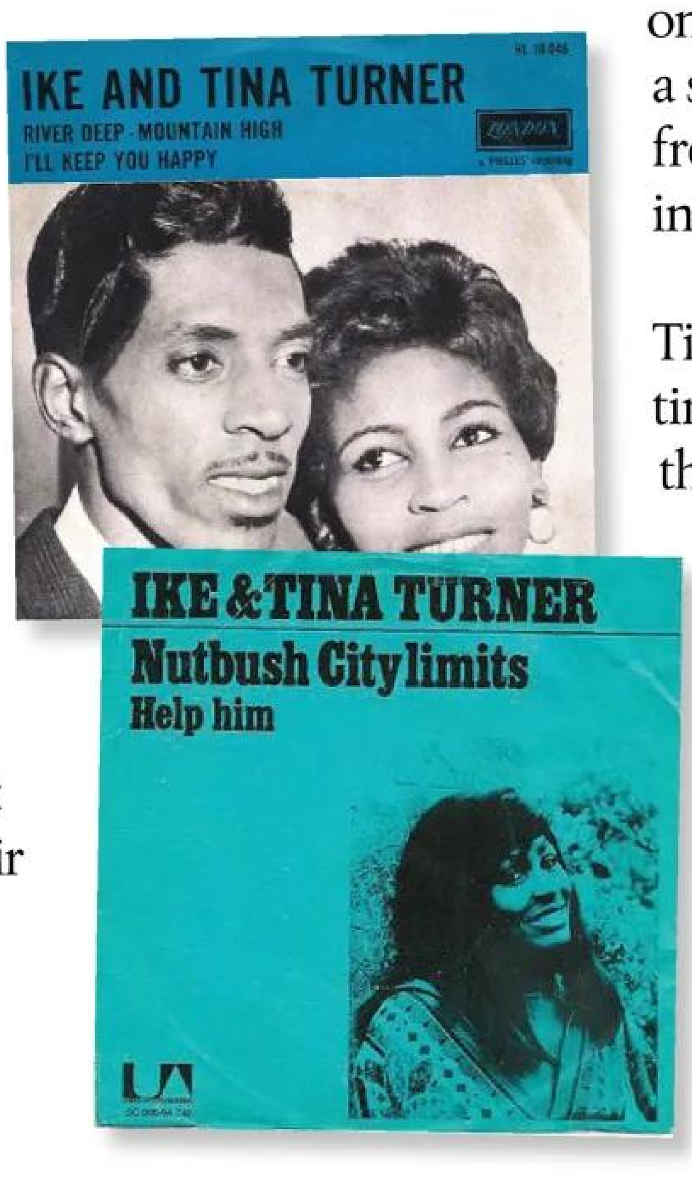
“Better to be someone else’s maid than Ike Turner’s wife was my attitude.”

Tina Turner

behind her and looks mean, a neat little man with a goatee and sad cynical eyes. I was standing right under the stage. So, Tina started whirling and pounding and screaming, melting by the minute, and suddenly she came thundering down on me like an avalanche, backside first, all that flesh shaking and leaping in my face. And I reared back in self-defence, all the front rows did, and then someone fell over and we all immediately collapsed in a heap, struggling and cursing, thrashing about like fish in a bucket. When I looked back up again, Tina was still shaking above us, her butt was still exploding, and she looked down on us in triumph. So sassy, so smug and evil. She’d used her arse as a bowling ball, us as skittles, and she’d scored a strike. Smart woman: her flesh dissolving and her hair all flying and her big man-eater teeth flashing. She ate us all for breakfast.”

But along with the sensuality and physicality of her performing style there was another, more technical, side to Tina’s singing abilities which was revealed by Phil Spector when he co-wrote and produced the landmark 1966 hit *River Deep Mountain High*. Although Ike Turner was credited on the record, Spector, who was a similarly unhinged control freak, had ensured that Ike had no involvement in the making of it.

Musing on the song years later, Tina said: “I didn’t know it at the time because I couldn’t see into the future, but I came out of that collaboration transformed, with a taste of independence, an unaccustomed sense of self-worth, and an audience in Europe, where they embraced the song that America didn’t know how to appreciate. After that



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STARS PAY TRIBUTE

“I’m so saddened by the passing of my wonderful friend. She was truly an enormously talented performer and singer. She was inspiring, warm, funny and generous. She helped me so much when I was young and I will never forget her.”
Mick Jagger

“God bless you, the Queen Of Rock And Soul and a dear friend to our family.”
Ronnie Wood

“I saw Tina on her first major tour, supporting The Rolling Stones at Birmingham Odeon on 1966 and became an instant fan. RIP.”
Geezer Butler

“I was a benefactor of her energy, creativity and talents. A woman who started in rural Nutbush, TN cotton fields and worked her way to the very top. Tina was great inspiration to me when I was starting out and remains so to this day. Love you, Tina. RIP.”
Debbie Harry

“I loved her version of Proud Mary! It was different and fantastic. I was also so happy because she chose my song and it was her breakthrough record.”
John Fogerty

“Another legend leaves us with one less living icon. There will never be another like her.”
Ginger Wildheart

“One of the greatest legends of rock and roll and soul has passed. She was a force of nature and paved the way for all of us rockers.”
Sheryl Crow

"We have lost one of the world's most exciting and electric performers. A total legend on record and on stage. She was untouchable."
Elton John

"God bless Tina turner, peace and love to all her family."
Ringo Starr

"I'll be forever grateful for the time we spent together on tour, in the studio and as friends."
Bryan Adams

"[It's] impossible to overstate her importance to rock 'n' roll stagecraft, aside and apart from her incredible vocal primacy."
Vernon Reid

"I'm devastated, what a woman! A friend and mentor - 'It takes two' - but there was only one Tina Turner."
Rod Stewart

"There are music giants, there are legends and then there's Tina Turner. Put on our planet to do exactly what she accomplished… everything."
Steve Stevens

"It was a highlight of my career to have sung and shared the stage with such a wonderful human being."
Jimmy Barnes

"Bless you for a life of extreme courage and inspiration."
Nils Lofgren

Private dancers: Tina Turner on stage with Bryan Adams at Wembley Arena, London 1985.

"Smart woman: her flesh dissolving and her hair all flying and her big man-eater teeth flashing. She ate us all for breakfast."

Nik Cohn

song, a line was drawn… I knew better, and I wanted more."

Following the No.3 chart success in the UK of *River Deep Mountain High*, the Ike & Tina Turner Revue made their first visit to Britain where they opened for the Rolling Stones on their tour of 1966. It was the start of a long and fruitful relationship between Tina and the Stones, and particularly between Tina and Mick Jagger. The Stones hired Ike & Tina again to open their 1969 tour of America, and footage of Tina giving a spectacularly lascivious performance of *I've Been Loving You Too Long* was included in *Gimme Shelter*, the 1970 documentary directed by Albert and David Maysles which chronicled the tour that ended with the disastrous events at the Altamont free festival.

It's often said that Turner taught Jagger to dance. "That's not true," she told me in her emphatic way. "Inspired him, perhaps. He would stand at the corners of the stage and watch us. And in the same way that you take certain ideas that help you to write songs, you take certain things that help you to create your performing style. I may have shown him how to do the pony steps that we used in our routines. But not teaching him. His mother taught him to dance. I met his mother and that's what she told me. Mick and I we're performers, not dancers. We just do street dance steps."

The 1970s brought more hits. Their extraordinary version of the Creedence Clearwater Revival song *Proud Mary*, which began sotto voce and then exploded into a frenetic, rock'n'roll free-for-all, became a million-selling hit in 1971, landing them firmly in the top five of the US pop chart for the first time. *Nutbush City Limits* was a top-five hit in the UK and a big smash throughout Europe in 1973. It was to be their last big hit as a duo.

Tina's memorable performance in the role of the Acid Queen in Ken Russell's 1975 film *Tommy*, based on The Who's rock opera, gave her a taste for acting and, perhaps more significantly, another taste of what it was like to work and live independently of Ike. By the mid-70s Ike had become heavily addicted to cocaine, which brought out the worst of an already deeply flawed personality. He would beat Tina before and after their "lovemaking" sessions, and "punish" her for the most minor transgressions by burning her with scalding coffee and cigarettes.

Tina, by contrast, had found solace by becoming a Buddhist and immersing herself in a daily routine of chanting and meditation which brought her calmness and an inner strength. She later wrote the book *Happiness Becomes You* (published in 2020) which outlines how she applied her Buddhist principles to overcome the many personal and professional challenges she faced throughout her life. ➢

GETTY x3

"One of the world's most exciting and electric performers. A total legend on record and on stage. She was untouchable."

Elton John

GETTY

Giving it the full Tina in Chicago in 1984. (Top) as the Acid Queen in the 1975 film *Tommy*, and (right) in the 1985 film *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*.

"If Tina had a choice, she'd do a real hard rock, heavy metal album... real good, pumping stuff like early AC/DC."

Manager Roger Davies

She needed every ounce of resolve at her disposal after events came to a head in July 1976. During a car journey from Dallas airport to the Statler Hilton, Ike set about her with his fists and a shoe. "By the time we reached the hotel, my face was swollen and my once-beautiful suit was splattered with blood," Tina recalled in her memoir. "We attracted a lot of attention when we stepped out of the car, although Ike claimed we had been in an 'accident'. I looked like a woman who had been broken and silenced."

Tina waited until Ike had fallen asleep in their hotel room before gathering a few toiletries into a case and slipping out of the hotel via the kitchen and into a back alley. In a state of panic and confusion she ran across a busy interstate highway and up an embankment to a Ramada hotel where, battered, bloodied and with just 36 cents in her pocket, she presented herself to the manager and asked for sanctuary.

There followed a stretch in the wilderness during which Tina fought to re-establish her career as a performer in her own right and to make a life for herself without Ike. At the age of 37 she was dependent on friends for a place to live. "While my hosts were out, or at work, I scrubbed their homes from top to bottom, organised their closets, and got rid of their junk and trash," she recalled. "Better to be someone else's maid than Ike Turner's wife was my attitude."

Her divorce from Ike was finalised in 1978. She took no money or property from the settlement; her sole "demand" was the right to continue using her name (which Ike had trademarked). For a while Tina earned money from guest appearances on TV chat shows (*Hollywood Squares, Donny & Marie, The Sonny & Cher Show*) and playing on the cabaret/Las Vegas circuit. She released a couple of solo albums, *Rough* (1978) and *Love Explosion* (1979), neither of which sold well, after which she was dropped by her label United Artists.

She was beginning to look like a has-been, but never lost faith in her own ability or ambition. She approached a young Australian promoter called Roger Davies to become her manager in 1980, and with his help and guidance Tina began to re-fashion both herself and her music to appeal to a new, much broader audience.

Her rock friends rallied round. In 1981 Rod Stewart invited her to tour with him and she performed *Hot Legs* with him on the influential US TV show *Saturday Night Live*. And the Stones once again added her to the bill for dates on their American Tour to promote *Tattoo You* (the highest grossing tour of 1981). In 1982 she recorded a version of The Temptations' hit *Ball Of Confusion* for BEF, an offshoot of the UK group Heaven 17, and made a video which was shown to good responses on the new video channel MTV. In 1983 when she was trying to negotiate a recording contract with Capitol, David Bowie helpfully told executives at the label that Tina Turner was his favourite singer. He showed up at her showcase gig at The Ritz in New York with Keith Richards and other celebrities who later partied the night away with Tina – an event which she subsequently described as a "Cinderella" moment which "changed my life dramatically".

The initial breakthrough as a solo star came with a version of Al Green's *Let's Stay Together* produced with a modern, stylish touch by Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh of Heaven 17. A surprise hit on both sides of the Atlantic, it paved the way for the album *Private Dancer* and its accompanying single *What's Love Got To Do With It*, both released in May 1984.

With its title track, written by Mark Knopfler, and other songs by bespoke pop songwriters such as Terry Britten and Mike Chapman and Nicky Chinn, there was no doubt that Tina had been guided in her choice of material by Roger Davies.

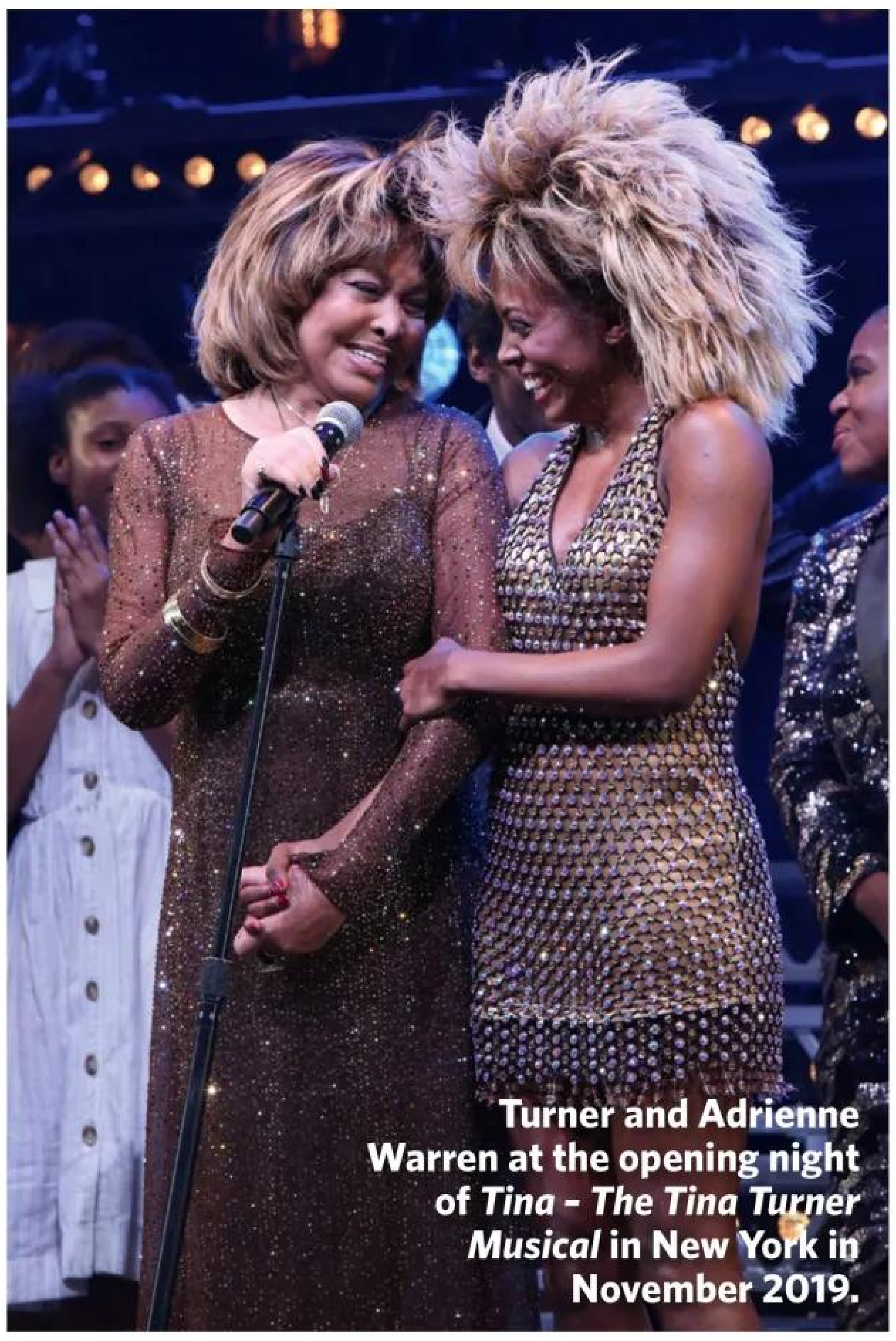
"There was a lot of the music on *Private Dancer* which she didn't really like, to be honest, and she'll tell you that herself," Davies told Charles Shaar Murray in 1988. "But I said: 'That's the direction we have to go in. I know you want to do an AC/DC album, but we're not ready for that yet.' If Tina had a choice, she'd do a real hard rock, heavy metal album. I don't mean bang-your-head-against-the-wall stuff, but real good, pumping stuff like early AC/DC."

GETTY x2; MAD MAX: SHUTTERSTOCK

TERRY O'NEILL / ICONIC IMAGES

Centre of attention: Queen Tina and other rock royalty gather for the Prince's Trust 10th-anniversary concert at Wembley Arena, June 1986.

Turner and husband Erwin Bach attend Paris Fashion Week in 2018.



Turner and Adrienne Warren at the opening night of *Tina – The Tina Turner Musical* in New York in November 2019.

TOP: BOB FOY / CAMERA PRESS; GETTY x2

"I always played to the women in the audience, because if you've got the girls on your side, you've got the guys."

Tina Turner

Her rock credentials were bolstered by a duet with Bryan Adams on his song *It's Only Love*. Adams joined her on stage during the *Private Dancer* tour, and there is a memorable video of the pair performing in Birmingham in 1985. The chemistry is off the scale as the two of them romp through the song, their rasping vocals set against the soaring, swooping interplay between the two fine guitarists in Turner's touring band, James Ralston and Jamie West-Oram. There is a classic moment when Turner steadies Adams's vocal mic in a way that is somehow both lewd and motherly.

"Looking sexy on stage was never my primary goal, and I didn't worry about how guys would react to my look," Turner said. "I always played to the women in the audience, because if you've got the girls on your side, you've got the guys. I wanted the women to like me, so I set out to convince them that I was just having fun, not trying to steal their men."

But if looking sexy was not her primary goal, she was not shy about doing what it took to grab the attention of her male fans. In 1985 she took a starring role in the Live Aid show singing *State Of Shock* and *It's Only Rock 'N Roll* with her long-time admirer Mick Jagger, who ended a performance of supercharged sexual energy by rather ungallantly ripping her skirt off.

In the same year,Turner took on the role of Aunty Entity in *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. "That was the greatest costume I ever had on my body," she said. "It was cutting me up, but I thought: 'I don't care. I'll bleed. I'll die. I love where I am. I love every minute of it. This is where I need to be.'" The soundtrack provided another enduring hit with *We Don't Need Another Hero*.

Having established herself as a solo star, and with her destiny now grasped firmly in her own hands, there were no further missteps on the road ahead. A succession of multimillion-selling albums ensued – *Break Every Rule* (1986), *Foreign Affair* (1989), *What's Love Got To Do With It* (1993), *Wildest Dreams* (1996) and *Twenty Four Seven* (1999) – each accompanied by increasingly extravagant tours of the world's biggest venues. By the time she went out on her Twenty Four Seven Tour, at the age of 60, Turner was a certified megastar. Striding across a vast stadium stage set designed by Mark Fisher (Rolling Stones designer), she wended her way through a futuristic, multi-level vision of cantilevered walkways and chrome archways that exploded into life with shooting pyrotechnic displays. And every night as she sang *Nutbush City Limits* she would be hoisted into the air and swung above the heads of the audience on the end of an enormous crane arm.

In 2013, Turner married former record label executive Erwin Bach, her boyfriend of 27 years, and was getting ready to settle into a well-earned retirement, when she suffered a devastating succession of health problems: a stroke, intestinal cancer and kidney failure, the latter requiring a transplanted organ, which was donated by Bach. She came through it all strong enough to attend the opening of *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* at the Aldwych in London in April 2018. Watching her life story unfold in front of her eyes, Turner thought about "the long road I travelled from Nutbush to this theatre in London – all that I went through, from the beginning of Little Anna Mae, all the way to here. And I thought: 'I am blessed.'"

NO SMOKE WITHOUT

Had Montreux Casino not burned down at the time, there would be no *Smoke On The Water*, and *Machine Head* would have been a very different **Deep Purple** album to the one we know. This is the story of the band's sixth album, in their own words.

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DEEP PURPLE'S *FIREBALL* was the second album recorded with the Mark II line-up. It was another No.1 hit in the UK, but despite its success there was a nagging feeling within the band that the best was yet to come. As 1971 drew to a close, it was time for a change of scene…

Roger Glover (bassist): We needed to make another record, and we'd become pretty successful, and accountants and lawyers and management said: "You know, if you record outside of England you pay a different tax rate." And that's the reason we were in Switzerland. It could have been Germany or France, anywhere as long as it was out of England.

Jon Lord (keyboard player): We'd heard the Rolling Stones had a wonderful mobile studio, so we contacted them and we were able to get hold of that. And the reason we went to Montreux was because we were going to be in America at the end of 1971, but Ian Gillan got ill. It was hepatitis, I think – which was the disease to have at the time.

Ritchie Blackmore (guitarist): It was a very fashionable thing to have. Gillan went down with it first. And then we went back to America to do the shows we'd cancelled. And then I got hepatitis, and I ended up in a Harley Street hospital, and had about two months off. That gave me some time to write something. I came up with *Space Truckin'*, *Smoke On The Water* and stuff like that.

Ian Gillan (vocalist): *Fireball* gave us a chance to actually bring out what I always call the funk in the band, instead of just pure English rock. However, when we got to doing *Machine Head*, there was a lot of pressure to do what most people saw as a follow-up to *In Rock*. We'd got to get back to doing that rock stuff, and that was pretty much how we approached it.

Lord: A dear friend of ours, called Claude Nobs, who ran the Montreux Jazz Festival, said: "Why don't you come to Montreux?"

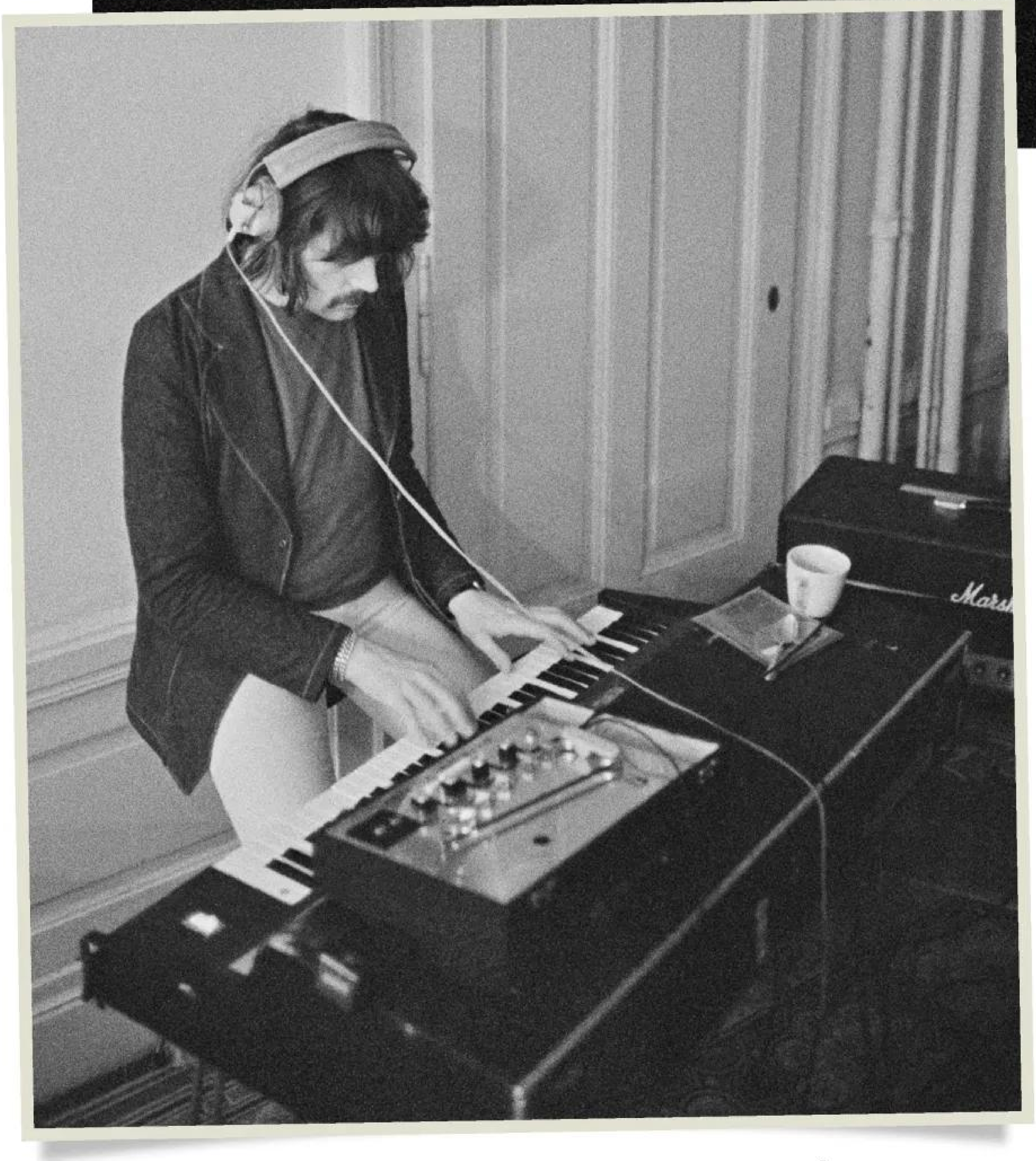
Colin Hart (Deep Purple tour manager): *Machine Head* was supposed to be recorded at the Montreux Casino, and we were supposed to be starting after Frank Zappa played a gig at the casino. They [Purple] were going to record where the casino concerts were held.

Ian Paice (drummer): We went down to Switzerland, and everything went from being under control and knowing what we were going to do to, literally, going up in flames.

Hart: The Stones' mobile was parked next to the casino. The Frank Zappa show was the night before and we'd all been invited. It happened just like it did in the song [*Smoke On The Water*]. Some idiot fired a flare gun into the suspended ceiling and it just erupted into flames.

Claude Nobs (Montreux Festival organiser): The ceiling was made from some very flammable things, that you could not do any more these days. And the air-conditioning system started to get crazy because there was more and more heat coming in. ▷

During the recording of *Machine Head* at the Grand Hotel in Montreux: (from left) Jon Lord, Roger Glover, Ian Gillan, Ritchie Blackmore.



Blackmore: Frank Zappa was very nonplussed. He stopped playing and said: "It appears the roof is on fire, and we have to vacate the premises and we'll do it in an orderly fashion…" And at that point he threw down his guitar and jumped out of the window.

Paice: Within minutes it was an inferno, flames hundreds of feet in the air. Back at the hotel, Roger and Ian saw this pall of smoke drifting across Lake Geneva.

Hart: We all ended up standing on the edge of the lake, watching the place go up in flames. Our concern was for the mobile studio that was gently roasting. Someone tried to get it out, but the water from the fire department's hoses meant it was bogged down. It was getting hosed down with water on one side, while the other side was blistering. We thought it was all over. But Claude Nobs took it all so matter-of-factly: "Don't worry, we'll find somewhere else."

Nobs: We first went to The Pavilion [theatre and ballroom], and I said to the guys: "We can record only until ten o'clock in the evening, due to the noise carrying across the mountains. We'll finish it then and go out for dinner at ten p.m." Of course, the first night they finished at four in the morning.

Paice: The first track we laid down – and the last to be finished – was *Smoke On The Water*, before we knew what it was going to be called. There was no sound-proofing and we were recording at night. A hell of a racket!

Blackmore: We did *Smoke On The Water* there, and the riff I made up in the spur of the moment. I just threw it together with Ian Paice. Roger Glover joined in. We went outside to the mobile unit and were listening back to one of the takes, and there was some hammering on the door. It was the local police, and they were trying to stop the whole thing because it was so loud. We knew that they were coming to close everything down. We said to Martin Birch, our engineer: "Let's see if we have a take." So they were outside hammering and taking out their guns… It was getting pretty hostile.

Martin Birch (engineer): It was about two in the morning, the neighbours were complaining. We locked all the doors. I mean, literally, it was 'da-da-da! Bang, bang', "polizei, polizei" "Piss off!" 'Da-da-da'. So we had to get the track down before the police broke in and chucked us out.

Glover: About a day or two after the fire, I'd woken up in my room, and before I'd even opened by eyes I said some words out loud. It was almost like an echo in the room: "Did I just say something out loud?" I must have. And what

SHEPARD SHERBELL/GETTY x2

"[Purple] had this finesse and it had this animal. And to me, that's what sums up Deep Purple."

Roger Glover

did I say? "Smoke on the water." I went down to breakfast and I said to Ian: "Oh a title came to me today: *Smoke On The Water*." There's a great photograph, it's taken over Ian's shoulder, and he's got a notebook and the first two verses of *Smoke On The Water* are written, and the third one is yet to be written, and I'm opposite him. And that's actually how we wrote it.

Paice: The recording was so quick. I really don't remember it. Music was written before, but not the vocals – there's no way *Smoke* could have been written unless the casino fire had happened.

Gillan: I can't remember the solo being recorded, but it's very good – full of character and technique, normal for Ritchie.

Nobs: By now I'd had to find them another place. I found the Grand Hotel. So we took a gangway in the middle of the hotel, and put some absorbing material in there – about a hundred mattresses – to get the sound right.

Gillan: We had to make it up as we went along. I remember equipment being set up all over the place to get some separation without us turning down. It was surreal when I think back, but normal at the time. You did what you had to do. The truck was too far away and it was bloody cold, so no one was keen to listen to anything until we felt it was right.

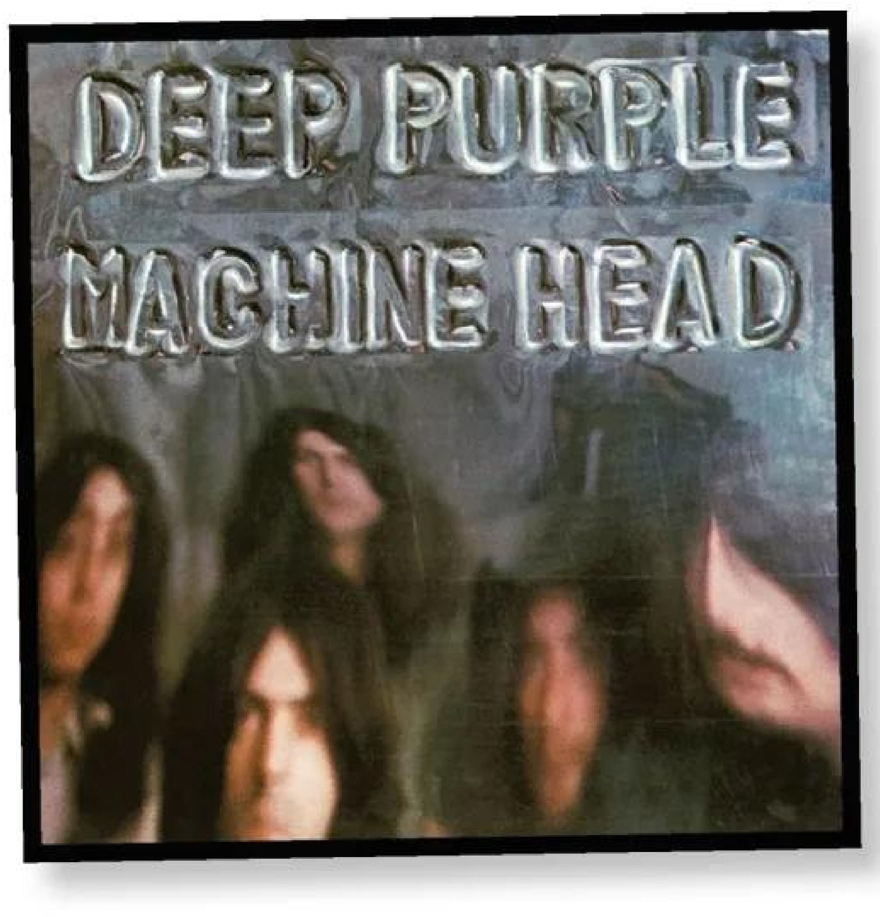
Lord: The Grand Hotel was this forbidding place, this huge great thing – cold, damp, with great ceilings and echoing corridors. I wouldn't have wanted to stay there in a million years. But we could get it for about thruppence a week.

SHEPARD SHERBELL/GETTY x2

"*Smoke* only made it on to the album as a filler track because we were short of time."

Ian Gillan

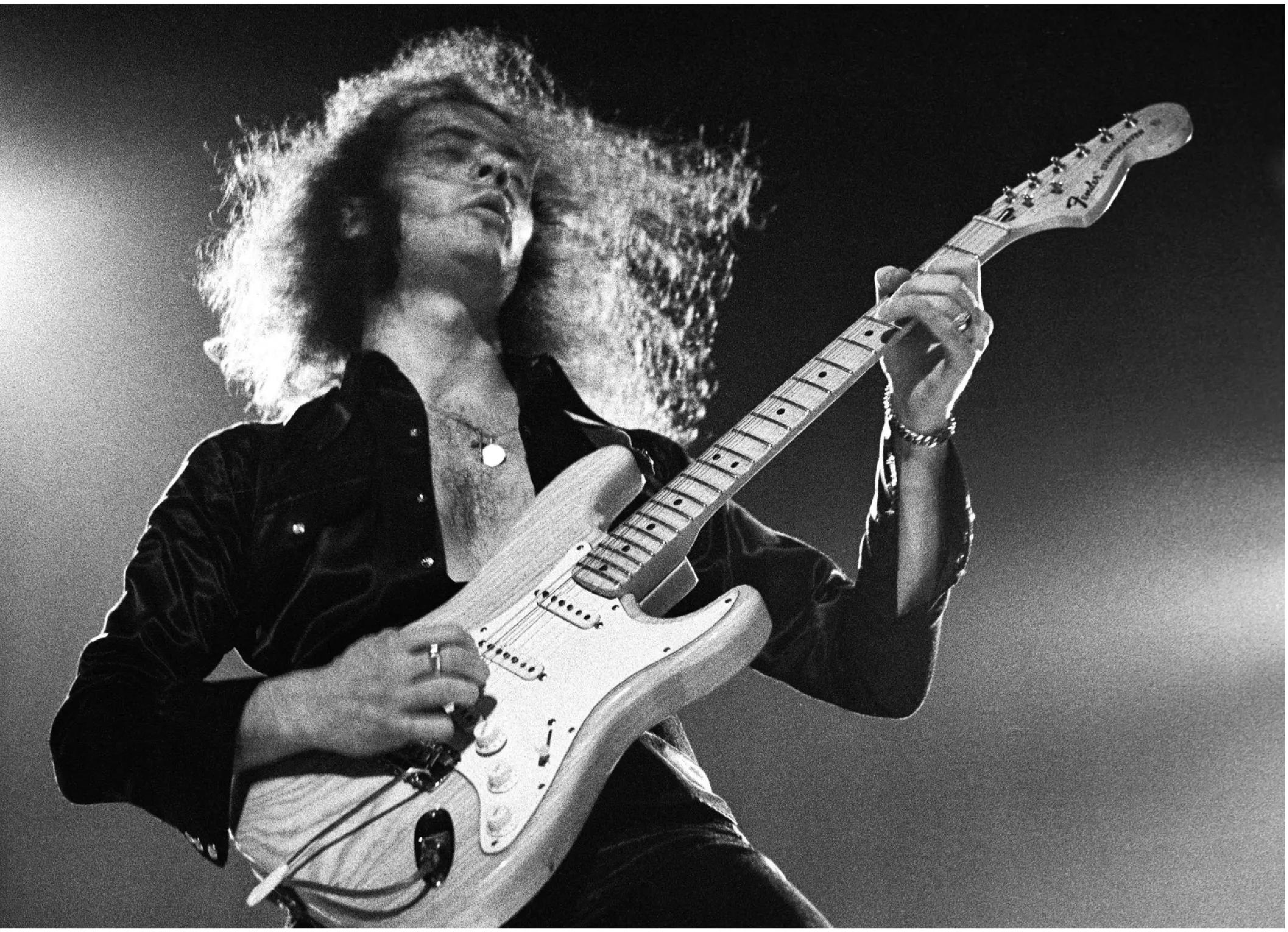
Blackmore: It was the depths of winter, and we would set up in the corridor of the hotel, Ian Paice in a little alcove with his drums. But every time we wanted to listen to a playback, we would have to leave the corridor and go through two doors into a bedroom, across the bedroom, through another two doors into a bathroom and on to a balcony, run down the balcony, through the French windows into another bedroom, across the bedroom through another two doors on to the landing, and then down a winding staircase to reception and across reception to the front door, and across the courtyard, and then we would get to the mobile. By which time we weren't too interested in hearing a playback anyway. It was absolutely freezing and the fingers were going numb. Interesting how a couple of days in, it was: "Do you want to hear that one back?" "No, it's okay, Martin."



Birch: I think in the end they knew when it was good. And they would ask me, cos I had a talk-back into the studio with them. Once they got a song clear in their heads, that was it, we'd start laying it down. And the majority of the time it was one, two, three takes, something like that. We didn't do any overdubs on the backing tracks. Everything was done live.

Lord: Old mattresses, blankets, we stuffed everything down this corridor and made it as dead a recording environment as possible so that Martin could record it absolutely flat. And if you listen to *Machine Head* with that in mind, you'll hear it's a very dark album. After Ritchie left in 1993, Joe Satriani filled in for us for six months. And he said: "I tell you what, man, that's the darkest rock album."

Glover: *Highway Star* is the opening track on the album. Ritchie is the driving force behind this. He plays with such precision – that driving, machine-gun effect. I came up with the title and a couple of lines. Most of



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"Most of my solos were very spontaneous, except for *Highway Star*. Probably the one time I ever worked out a solo."

Ritchie Blackmore

the song is Gillan's, and everyone joined in on the arrangement. The thing that really impressed me when I first heard it again after so many years was Paicey is swinging – and we're all playing straight. And that's the essence of rock'n'roll.

Blackmore: Most of my solos were very spontaneous, except for *Highway Star*. Probably the one time I ever worked out a solo. I've heard other guitar players talk about that solo, but it's an average guitar solo. It just has identity, and maybe that's what people relate to.

Glover: On *Maybe I'm A Leo*, it wasn't a conscious thought, but I'd just heard *How Do You Sleep?* by John Lennon, and what I really liked about it was that the riff came in not on the down beat. And I thought I want to write a riff that instead of going 'two, three, four, riff', went 'two, three, four, badam, badam, bom!'

Blackmore: I really like *Pictures Of Home*, because it is very melodic. There were some members of the band that didn't like that one at all.

Gillan: I remember writing *Pictures Of Home* with Ritchie at his house near the airport, near Heathrow. I went round there and his wife Babs was standing there looking Rubenesque, and their dog was doing back somersaults. And we walked upstairs to where he had his guitars. And he had this riff which was based on [Chris Farlowe's cover of the Rolling Stones'] *Out Of Time*.

Blackmore: I heard the riff for that on a short-wave radio, and it was probably coming from Bulgaria or Turkey, or somewhere like that. One of these days, these Bulgarian/Turkish people are going to come out the woodwork, saying: "I wrote that."

Gillan: He told me that it was from a song called *Out Of Time*. But of course he does get Bulgarian radio signals coming through his head quite a lot, so that would explain that other part.

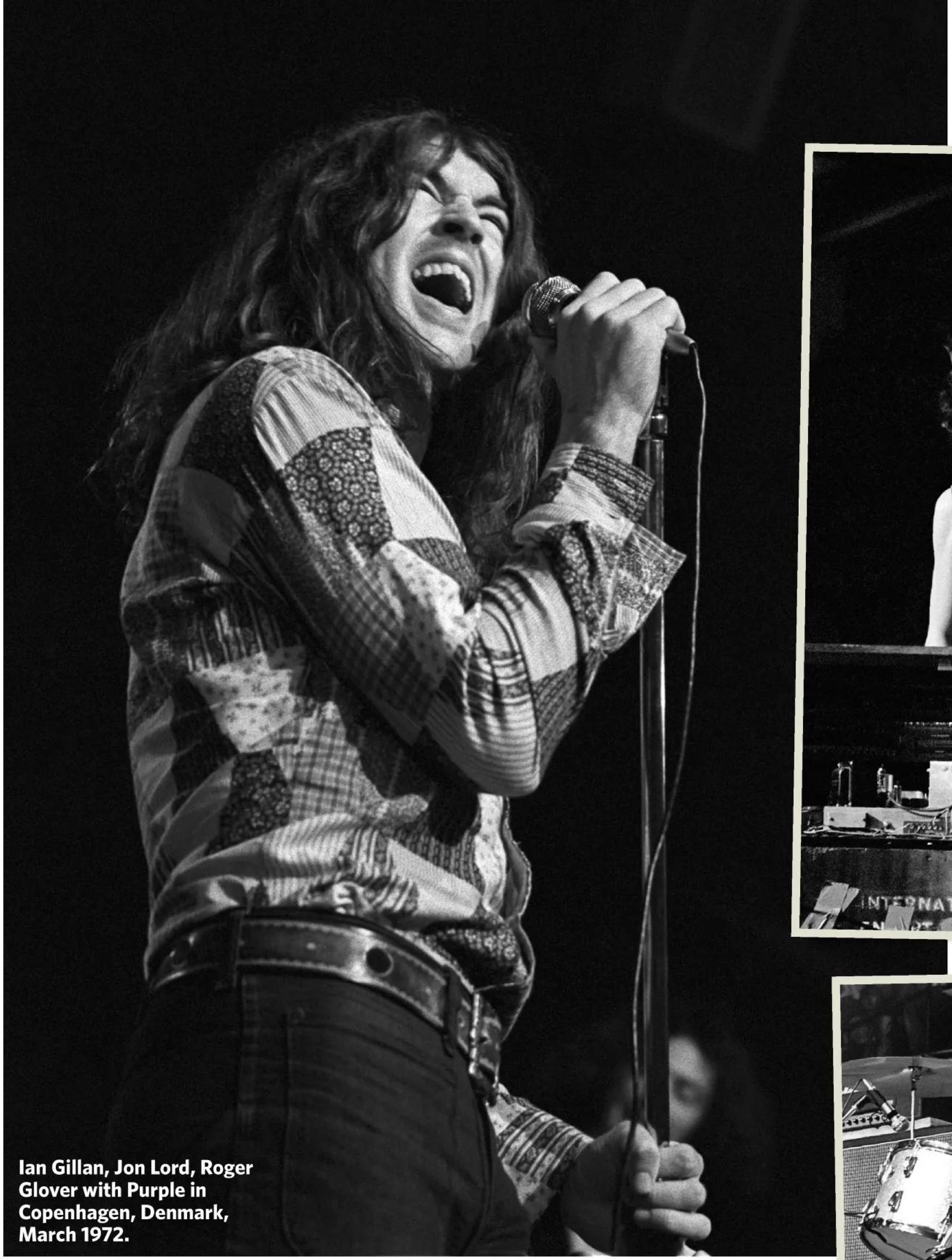
Blackmore: I remember the rest of the band were a little worried about Ian singing about eagles and snow. I never listen to lyrics anyway, unless it's Bob Dylan singing. So I said: "Well, eagles and snow. Sounds good enough to me, carry on."

Glover: We invested an enormous amount of time and trouble into *Never Before,* because we thought it was going to be a single; it was a bit more commercial.

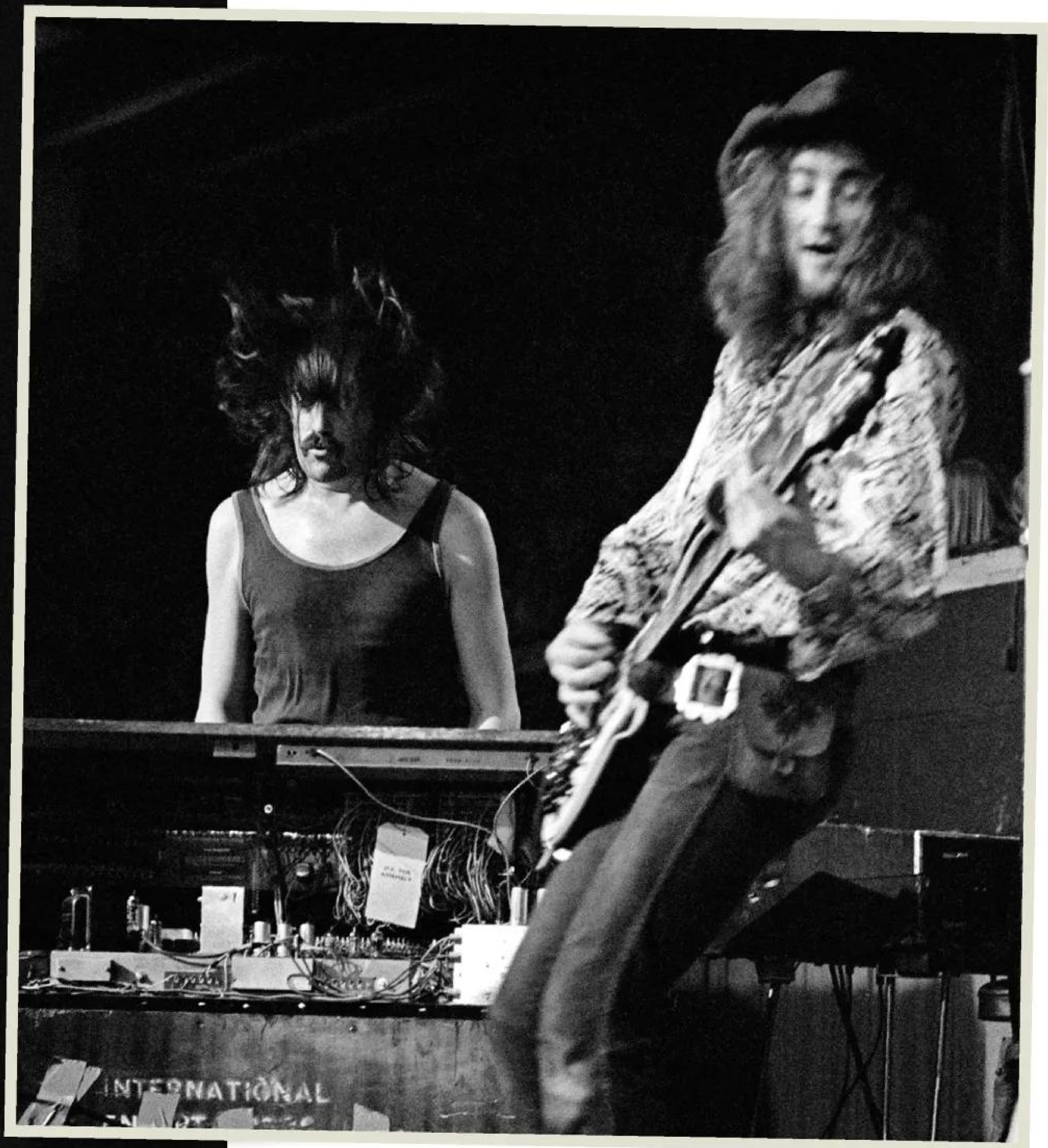
Paice: We thought we should have one track which was radio-friendly. But you can't get them all right.

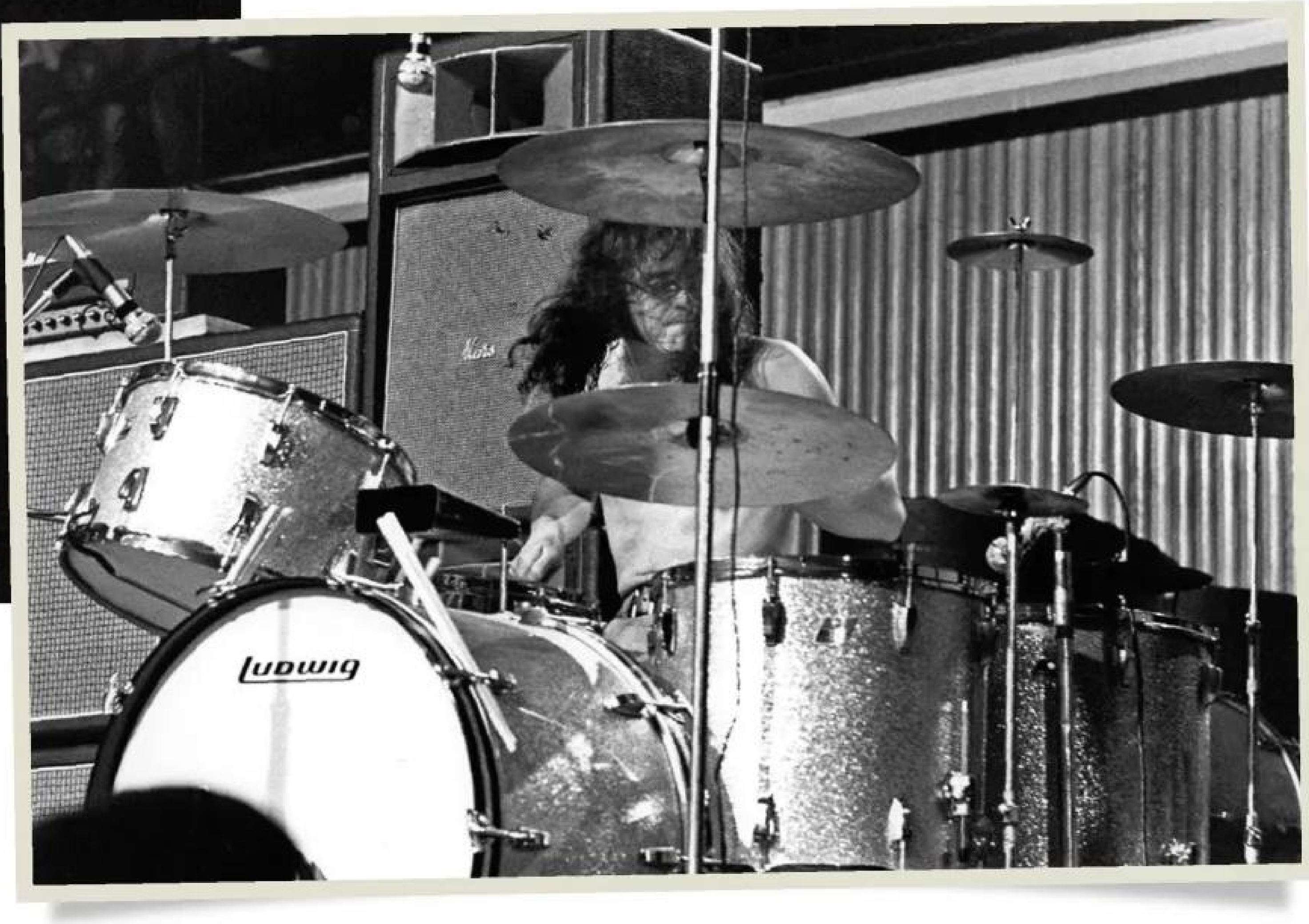
Lord: I think *Never Before* is one of the least popular tracks on *Machine Head*. But try and imagine *Never Before* with [Free/Bad Company vocalist] Paul Rodgers wailing away on the blue notes, and I think you'll arrive at what Ritchie was expecting to hear. What Ian Gillan did was this strange hybrid between a slight pop tune and a very hard delivery, which was what Gillan was astonishingly good at coming up with.

Gillan: I vowed I'd never talk again about that song. It was done for the wrong reasons.



Ian Gillan, Jon Lord, Roger Glover with Purple in Copenhagen, Denmark, March 1972.





MAIN: JAN PERSSON/GETTY; GETTY x2

Blackmore: I think we were more excited about *Never Before* than anything on the record. It's got this great, memorable little hook. And it failed miserably.

Paice: The crime to me was that the ballad, *When A Blind Man Cries* wasn't on the album [it was the B-side of the single *Never Before*]. It was from the same sessions, it had the same lyricism to it, but Ritchie – he no like it! It would have been a massive song now, had it been on that record.

Lord: The difficulty with that song, but what in fact made it a great track, was using the straight sound on the Hammond, and it pushed me into a way of playing that song which in later years, when we played it live, I never recreated. I never got back to being able to play it that way. I'd given myself a restraint, on purpose, and it shows up strongly on *When A Blind Man Cries.*

Gillan: *Lazy* was an instrumental to start with. Then they let me in. So it worked very well, cos the verses were just a blues shuffle. There was this huge, long intro to the song, and you never thought that there was gonna be any words coming to it, but eventually it got there.

Paice: *Lazy* is one of those that was better a year down the road recorded live, when we got to know it. Sometimes in the studio you just don't know the piece well enough.

Blackmore: With *Space Truckin'*, I remember in the early sixties there was a TV series called *Batman*. And I had this riff that was similar to the theme tune, and I saw how simple that was. I came up with this riff and took it to Ian Gillan and said: "I have this idea and it's so simple and so silly." I went over into the corner and played it to him very quietly – I was very shy – and he grasped it immediately, and said: "I think we can use it." And that turned into *Space Truckin'*.

"We thought we should have one track which was radio-friendly. But you can't get them all right."

Ian Paice on *Never Before*

Paice: My favourite track rhythmically on *Machine Head* is *Space Truckin'*, because of its solidity and simplicity – it's about the only time Ritchie played block Chuck Berry chords, four to the bar.

Gillan: I recollect the *Batman* connection. I remember we used to do *Batman* in [Gillan and Glover's pre-Deep Purple band] Episode Six, and so Roger would do it all the time, and I think Ritchie sort of improvised around that thing and came up with the beginning of it. But also there was this thing, *Keep On Truckin'* [a Robert Crumb comic strip from the 60s].

Paice: So the trucking thing was sort of very in vogue then. It was like, you know, grooving along the street – keep on trucking.

Gillan: We thought it was so modern to be living in the space age. So the idea of being a space trucker, as opposed to a road trucker, was interesting. So you could bring in all these wordsmith tricks and puns and stuff like: *'They've rocked around the Milky Way… They got music in their solar system… We had a lot of luck on Venus… We always had a ball on Mars…'*

Lord: We'd walked away from *Smoke On The Water* going: "This is a cool track but I don't quite know what we can do with it." ⊳

Machine makers: (l-r) Ritchie Blackmore, Ian Paice, Jon Lord, Roger Glover, Ian Gillan.

"The most important thing *Machine Head* did was to introduce Deep Purple to the USA, because *In Rock* didn't come out there."

Ian Paice

Gillan: It was just another riff, like *Into The Fire*. We didn't make a big deal out of it, and it wasn't being considered as a track for the album. It was a jam at the first sound-check. We didn't work on the arrangement – it was a jam. *Smoke*… only made it onto the album as a filler track because we were short of time. On vinyl, thirty-eight minutes – nineteen minutes per side – was the optimum time if you wanted good quality, and we were about seven minutes short with one day to go. So we dug out the jam and put vocals to it.

Nobs: One night, they rang, and came with a Philips cassette and said: "We just had a friend do a little thing for you which will not be on the album." They put the cassette on my player, and it was *Smoke On The Water*. And I said: "What? It's incredible!" And they said: "You think so? We should put it on the album?" I said: "It *has* to be on the album!"

Lord: I think it was Joe Smith at Warner Brothers in America who recognised *Smoke On The Water* as a potential single. We all thought *Never Before* was the obvious single. It shows how much bands know about commercial consideration. He said: "That's the single." And we said: "Are you out of your mind?" He said: "No, that's the one."

Glover: With *Machine Head* none of us predicted [the success of] *Smoke On The Water*. That was the last thing on our minds that that would become an iconic song. You never can tell, it's down to the people.

Paice: There is no logic to it. You create everything with the same intention of making it as good as you can make it, and every now and again the public goes: "I really like that one", and you just say: "Thank you!"

Blackmore: We made *Machine Head* in three weeks and three days, I think. It was very productive, very constructive, and it had some really good songs. It captured what we were about at the time. *Machine Head* came out, and it was a reasonable hit. But it wasn't until *Made In Japan* [live album, released in December 1972], when we did those songs on stage, that people actually absorbed it and registered that it was a good record. I was surprised, because I preferred the recorded versions.

Paice: The most important thing *Machine Head* did was to introduce Deep Purple to the USA, because *In Rock* didn't come out there.

Glover: Deep Purple to me was two elements: the superb musicianship of Ritchie, Jon and Ian Paice, and the sort of naive, homemade, simple quality of the songwriting that Ian Gillan and I brought to the band. If you get a band of superb musicians, it's very rarely successful commercially. If you've got a band of simple musicians, it can be successful. But what Purple had was both in equal measure. It had this finesse and it had this animal. And to me, that's what sums up Deep Purple.

DP and Martin Birch interview material taken from the transcripts for Classic Albums: Deep Purple – The Making Of Machine Head (Eagle Rock DVD, 2002). Additional interviews: Mark Blake, Drew Thompson, Henry Yates, Matt Frost, James Hanley.

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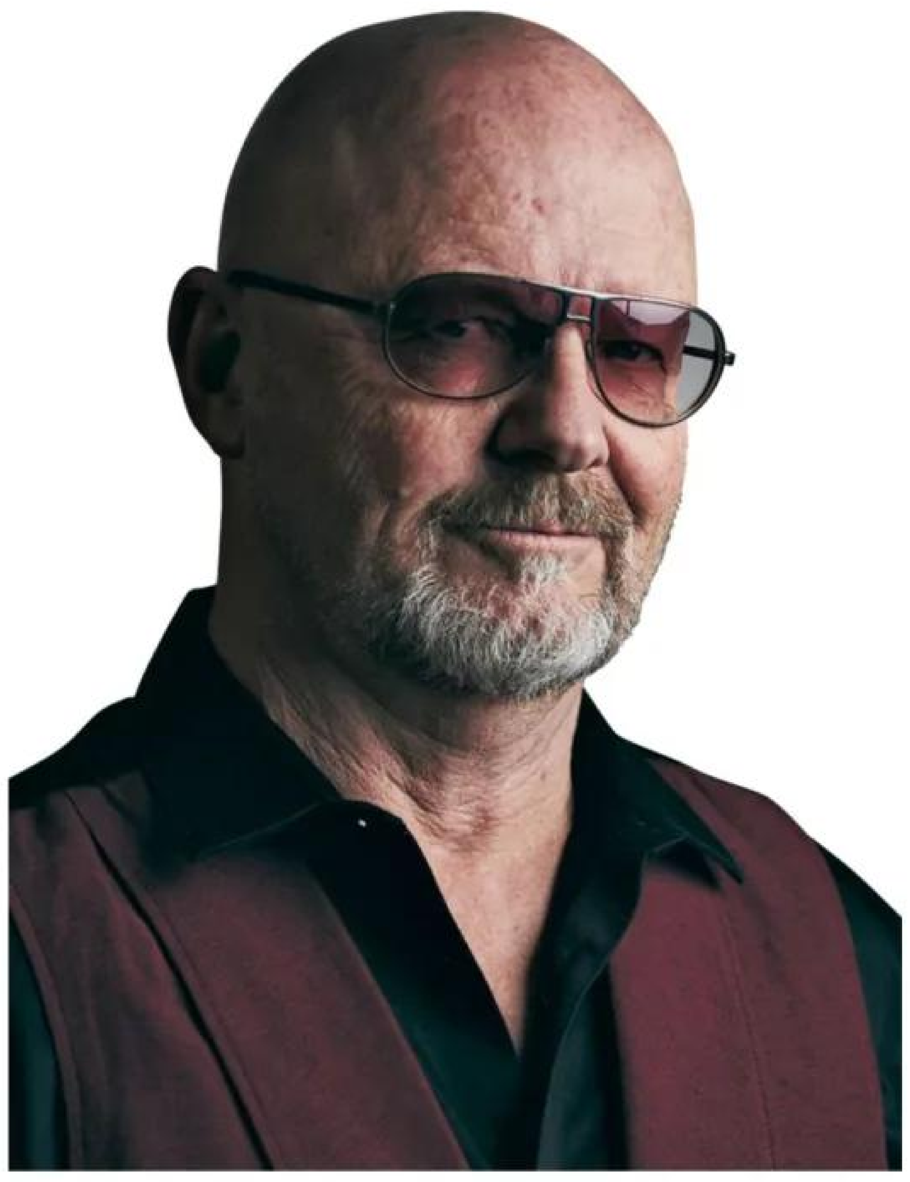


The Soundtrack Of My Life

Wishbone Ash guitarist/singer ***Andy Powell*** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Dave Ling**

Andy Powell is the last remaining co-founding member of the current line-up of Wishbone Ash, whose fiery yet inherently melodic signature twin-guitar sound (forged originally with Ted Turner) left an indelible stamp bands such as Thin Lizzy, Iron Maiden and even the Eagles. Londoner Powell, now a long-term resident of the United States, has a diverse musical taste. Here he talks about being "a child of the fifties" and what makes him tick.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

Because my family didn't have a record player it would have been on a radio show called *Uncle Mac's Children's Favourites*. It played a really eclectic mix. That's where I would have heard [US folk artist] Woody Guthrie for the first time.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

I'm almost certain it was *Apache* by The Shadows, probably with my band The Dekoys. I had picked up a beaten old acoustic guitar at eleven, and at the time The Shadows reigned supreme on the radio. As a child of the fifties it was the perfect time to learn the instrument.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

That's such an impossible question. I'm picking *Rubber Soul* by The Beatles, because I've got the sleeve framed in my house. Even though it was released in 1965 the production values still shine through, as does its overall vibe. I still love it. They were tapping into so many feelings and emotions.

THE GUITAR HERO

I'm known for being a big Peter Green fan, but I'm going to go with Clapton. I was at Cream's first gig, at the National Jazz & Blues Festival in Windsor in 1966. Eric had the guitar sound that all players wanted. He was everybody's mentor because he opened up a whole new world. Eric led the way in music and fashion, everything, really.

THE SINGER

Although Roger Daltrey was the epitome of the rock-god singer, I'm going to go with Arthur Brown. Like Eric, Arthur was at the Windsor Jazz & Blues Festival, and it was the first time I heard that more operatic style of singing. It was a major moment in my life.

THE SONGWRITER

I'm a massive fan of the writers from the Brill Building in New York during the mid-sixties, but narrowing it down to one choice it's got to be Joni Mitchell. She had such insight into life from a woman's perspective. Joni blew everyone else away – men or women.

THE BEST RECORD I MADE

I used to steer away from saying that *Argus* [1972] was Wishbone's watershed moment, but in my dotage I don't mind admitting that. *Argus* was our third album, and we pulled the style of the band together with that record. It's a classic.

THE WORST RECORD I MADE

In a fifty-year-plus career there has to be a worst, and it's our sixth album, *Locked In*. We had moved to Atlantic Records, who teamed us up with the late, great producer Tom Dowd. Let's just say it wasn't a marriage made in heaven. The whole experience felt miserable. We lost our big rock sound.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

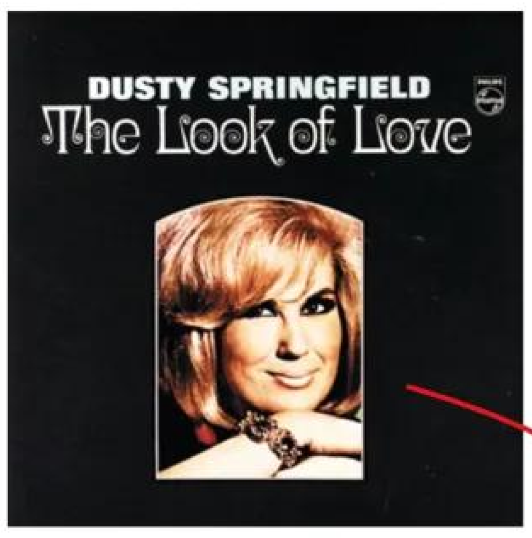
Some of my friends might not expect that I would love Rammstein, but I do. A fantastic band. We had the best time watching them.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

For me it's King's X. They had all of the accolades and great reviews, but they never quite made the mainstream. We played with them at the Sweden Rock Festival, and watching them they just blew me away. What an incredible band.

THE BEST LIVE ALBUM

Live At Leeds. I first opened for The Who when I was around fourteen, and our first American tour was opening for them. That band and their energy has been such an influence on me for so many years. Townshend's attitude has always been seminal. Any band that can tap into that will do well in rock'n'roll.



THE CULT HERO

It has to be Lowell George. I love Lowell's voice and his playing. It was Robert Palmer that turned me on to Little Feat, and from there I got into the whole New Orleans vibe.

MY 'IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE' SONG

The Look Of Love, preferably sung by Dusty Springfield. Dusty is my all-time favourite female singer.

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

Back to Joni Mitchell again. I'm going with *River* from her album *Blue* [1971]. I love its wistfulness. She's Canadian, and that song sums up the feeling of being all alone in the world. It takes the listener to those vast Canadian landscapes.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

This could get me into trouble. Without doubt it's *Love The One You're With* by Steven Stills. Not because it's about free love, but it's a great rock song, and the best Hammond organ solo of all time crops up right in the middle. It's ebullient and joyful… party time!

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

We have one of the best funeral songs ever: *Throw Down The Sword* [from Argus]. However, I'm going to go with *Dying To Live* by Edgar Winter. The music is so poignant, and the lyrics simple and spiritual.

The 50th-anniversary, multi-format boxed edition of Argus is out now via Madfish.

ANDY POWELL: JOSEPH BRANSTON; KING'S X: ALAMY

"Watching King's X they just blew me away. What an incredible band."

FRAGILE

Fortunate SONS

For a time in the late 60s, **Creedence Clearwater Revival** were the hottest band in America, if not the world. Former members recall their rocket ride from outcasts to "outselling The Beatles".

Words: **Rob Hughes** Additional reporting: **Ken Sharp**

Creedence Clearwater Revival were about to enter a storm. Seventy-two hours after touching down in London in April 1970, ahead of their first European tour, their press conference was overshadowed by shock news of The Beatles' split. Reporters, TV crews and distressed fans were gathering in numbers outside Beatles label Apple's offices on Savile Row; newspapers scurried to prepare competing headlines.

The next day's *NME* carried an oddly prophetic interview with CCR leader John Fogerty, conducted en route to customs inspection at Heathrow airport. He explained that his band were now experiencing what The Beatles had gone through a thousand-fold, their records selling in huge quantities worldwide. "Of course," he added, "we can never ever hope to emulate the impact made by The Beatles. Nobody can."

His modesty was understandable. But it transpired that Fogerty was somewhat underplaying the CCR effect. In a little over a year, they had scored half a dozen Top 10 singles and three platinum-selling albums in their native US – a run that was about to eclipse the Fabs in terms of sales. CCR were fast becoming the biggest band on the planet.

On the night of April 14, 1970, they set out to prove it. Four days on from the Beatles news, CCR played the first of two sell-out shows at London's Royal Albert Hall. It was an unmitigated triumph, the band powering through a set with explosive force, twisting the basic tenets of rock'n'roll into their own distinct brand of Californian voodoo.

"Right around that time we really started to come into our own," Fogerty reflects today. "You start to hear that confidence and swagger in the way we perform. That performance was pretty doggone good, pretty solid and strong and full of energy. I was a kid from El Cerrito and, as of two years before that, had never been anywhere. Suddenly I'm touring the States for a year and then experiencing all the musical touchstones of Europe."

"It was an honour to be there, knowing that we get to play in The Beatles' house, the Royal Albert Hall," says voluble CCR drummer Doug Clifford. "I'm an athlete, and always have been, so I'm competitive about when I play to win. I wanted us to do the best possible job. We all felt that way, I'm sure. And I think we pulled it off. I'm pretty sure I saw Eric Clapton [at the RAH], and I think I saw Paul McCartney. Just knowing where we were and what we were doing was a thrill."

The gig finished with CCR's customary long-form closer *Keep On Chooglin'*, after which the band received a 15-minute standing ovation.

More than half a century later, the just-released *At The Royal Albert Hall* captures the show in all its verve and glory. It's accompanied by a documentary, *Travellin' Band: Creedence Clearwater Revival At The Royal Albert Hall*, which features the entire show. (CCR's *The Royal Albert Hall Concert*, released in 1980, was reportedly from a concert at Oakland Alameda County Coliseum.) Narrated by actor Jeff Bridges and directed by Bob Smeaton, who was responsible for *The Beatles Anthology* TV series, it represents CCR at their most formidable.

"In terms of the performance, what I'd forgotten was the energy and the passion," marvels bassist Stu Cook. "I think we went there with the intent to take no prisoners. When I saw the performance, I was kind of surprised by the intensity of it. Woodstock was great, but it was incredibly

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Motor well and truly runnin': CCR in 1970.

"It was a rocket ride. Once the start button had been pressed... the larger arc of our career was pretty much out of our hands."

Stu Cook

chaotic and late and stressful. I think that first time we played the Royal Albert Hall was probably the pinnacle for me. If I could relive a night, that would be it."

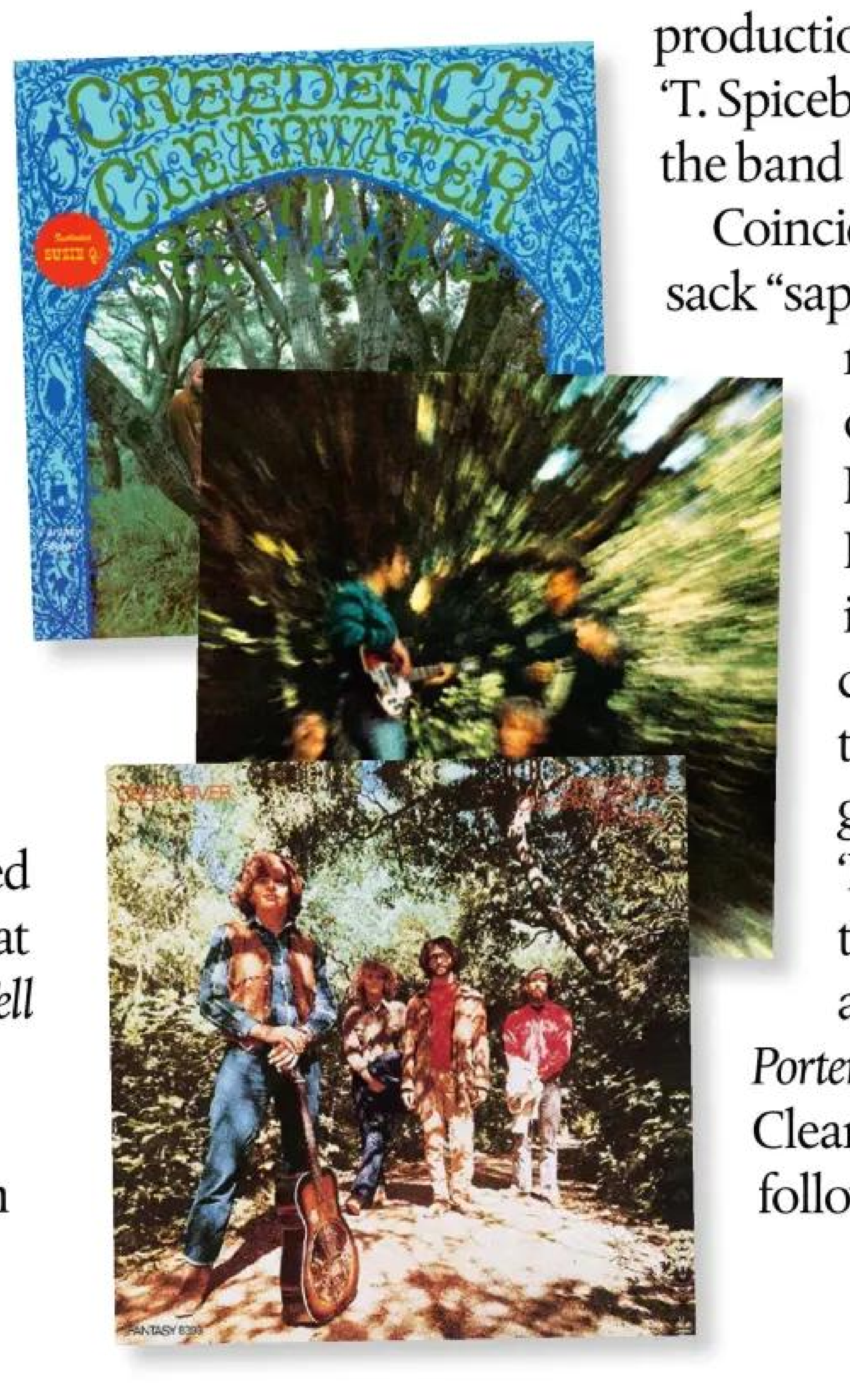
Despite suggestions to the contrary, CCR were no overnight sensations. Their success was the product of diligence, tenacity and sheer staying power. Initially forged in the suburbs of Northern California in 1959 as an instrumental trio,The Blue Velvets, things first started to move with the arrival of Fogerty's elder brother Tom on rhythm guitar and lead vocals.

Billed as Tommy Fogerty & The Blue Velvets, the band released three unremarkable singles on a local Oakland label between 1961 and '62, grounded in the music they'd grown up with: 12-bar blues, rockabilly and doo-wop. But the British Invasion, spearheaded by The Beatles, brought a change in direction. "These great British groups took over where America left off," Clifford says. "Rock'n'roll was an American phenomenon, but it had got kind of boring. And the Brits said: 'Well, we think it can be saved and we like it. We're going to do it.' And they did."

It brought a change of label too. In May 1964, three months after The Beatles' game-changing first appearance on US TV on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, The Blue Velvets auditioned for the San Francisco-based Fantasy Records, and were duly snapped up. Label co-owner Max Weiss, seeing an opportunity, encouraged the quartet to embrace the UK beat boom on early singles like *Don't Tell Me No Lies* and *You Came Walking*. Weiss insisted on releasing these under the name The Golliwogs, in an appallingly misguided attempt to make the band sound British. They made no impact. A further handful of singles suffered a similar fate. 1966 saw the emergence of John Fogerty, now lead singer, as the band's dominant force on *Fight Fire* and the howling psych-rock of *Walking On The Water*. Perhaps thankfully, this run of failure was interrupted by a spell of National Service for Clifford and the younger Fogerty.

On his return in 1967, Fogerty delivered his strongest song to date. *Porterville* was a pre-echo of the classic CCR sound, conceived on the parade field in the Army Reserve unit. "During all that marching I would get delirious, and my mind would start playing little stories," he told Creedence biographer Hank Bordowitz. "They all seemed to be sort of swampy and southern, in the woods and with snakes; Br'er Rabbit, Mark Twain, a great old movie with Dana Andrews and Walter Brennan called *Swamp Water*. So I ended up writing *Porterville* while I'm stomping around in the sun."

Released as the final Golliwogs single, in November '67, *Porterville* had Fogerty handling production as well (bizzarely credited as 'T. Spicebush Swallowtail'). Afterwards, the band rang the changes once more.



Coinciding with Fogerty's decision to sack "sappy love songs" in favour of narratives, the foursome took on a fresh moniker. Credence Newball, a good friend of Tom Fogerty's, provided the initial impetus. A TV ad for a brewing company (who prided themselves on "clear water") gave them added splash, while 'Revival' was an indicator of their commitment to the cause, a renewed statement of intent. *Porterville* was reissued as Creedence Clearwater Revival's debut 45 the following January.

Perversely, however, it was a cover that reversed the band's fortunes. A swamp-rock version of Dale Hawkins's *Suzie Q* was sent to progressive Bay Area radio station KMPX. The track was the kind of open-ended attack – eight-and-a-half minutes spread across both sides of a single – that chimed with the fluid psychedelia of the times.

But it was actually a product of rigorous discipline and endless rehearsals; CCR were no jam band. Instead, and unlike many of their San Francisco contemporaries, some of whom mocked them for their straight-up aesthetic, they were a totem of rootsy economy. "Our peers laughed at us, called us the boy scouts of rock'n'roll," Clifford told West Virginia's *Herald Mail* in 2015. "They said we'd never make a thing out of the music that we were playing, said we were not cool, not hip like they were. And it was kind of funny."

Suzie Q stalled just outside the *Billboard* Top 10 in the autumn of '68. By then Fantasy had seen enough to warrant an album. CCR's self-titled debut did well enough that year, peaking at No.52 in the US, although its other standout song (besides *Porterville*) was a further cover: a dynamic revival of Screamin' Jay Hawkins's old creep-show classic *I Put A Spell On You*.

GETTY

Preaching to the converted: John Fogerty fronting CCR at Oakland Coliseum Arena, California, 1970.

CCR may have finally found some traction, but they were still a band in search of an identity. It was a challenge that John Fogerty resolved to meet head on. "I had kind of taken stock at the end of 1968, and looked around at my situation," he remembers. "We had a hit with *Suzie Q*, but also, at least to my way of thinking, I realised it was kind of a novelty hit. It didn't necessarily announce a whole big career in an important cultural turn. I didn't have a manager, didn't have a publicist and we were on a very tiny jazz label. I said: 'Man, I'm going to just have to do it with music.' And I gave myself that directive and I stuck to it. I figured I had to do it, otherwise it wasn't going to happen."

In the preamble to the Royal Albert Hall show, Bob Smeaton's film offers a rare glimpse of life inside the rehearsal space. "We had a smaller factory in Doug's backyard at first," Stu Cook explains. "It was just a little tool shed, and we managed to stuff us and our small amplifiers and a drum set in there once the lawn mower and brooms and rakes were all taken out. And that's drapes, turned that red carpet down and turned it into The Factory."

"It was a great place to be," Clifford adds. "We had our music area, but at the same time we had a basketball hoop at one end of the space and ping-pong tables and foosball tables. It was kind of our home away from home. We were working in there, all trying to achieve the same goals, all of us in our different roles. It was a very productive place to be."

The Factory was where CCR became a proper band, refining their technique and locking in as an extraordinarily tight unit. They reached deep into the history of rock'n'roll – hard-charging blues, R&B, swampy soul, a little country – to fashion what Fogerty once called "a corruption of what has happened before", made fierce by a burning intensity.

"Our peers laughed at us, called us the boy scouts of rock'n'roll. They said we were not cool, not hip like they were."

Doug Clifford

It didn't look like much from the outside, but the vacant garage warehouse at 1230 5th Street in industrial Berkeley, just a few blocks over from the interstate, was Creedence's hothouse. Thanks to John Fogerty's demanding work ethic, the band rehearsed there almost daily. It was enough for Doug Clifford to refer to it as The Factory.

where we went every day from ten until two or three in the afternoon.

"When we got enough money where we could actually lease a proper rehearsal space, then it became the real factory," he continues. "It was basically just a large warehouse-type building with a couple of floors, and all the way in the back is where we carpeted and put up the blue velvet

As the quartet progressed, so did Fogerty's songwriting. He may have been a Californian kid, but his chosen milieu was the Deep South and its attendant mythology. The region's psycho-geography, and rich storytelling traditions, lent themselves to his new songs. *Proud Mary*,

© BARON WOLMAN / ICONIC IMAGES

London calling: CCR in front of the Albert Memorial opposite the Royal Albert Hall, April 15, 1970: (l to r) John Fogerty, Stu Cook, Tom Fogerty and Doug Clifford.

released in early 1969, was the first manifestation, written two days after Fogerty was discharged from the National Guard. It told the tale of a jaded city boy who leaves it all behind to hitch a ride '*on a riverboat queen*', the Mississippi paddle steamer of the title.

"One of my favourites that Leiber and Stoller wrote was a Coasters song called *Idol With The Golden Head*, because it was so colourful and kind of a complete story about an event," Fogerty explains of his immersion in narrative-driven pieces. "Another person very much like that is Chuck Berry. All his songs seem to tell a story with pictures. Bo Diddley had a song called *I'm Bad* and he talked about knocking some guy's legs out of place. Or *Who Do You Love?*, where you had a '*chimney made out of a human skull*' and a '*cobra snake for a necktie*'. Pretty graphic and scary imagery for a middle-class white boy. And very exotic too. Those were things that showed you the possibility of just using your imagination."

Driven by its freedom-riding gospel motif '*Rollin', rollin', rollin on the river*', *Proud Mary* spoke to something timeless within the American psyche. The single became CCR's first million seller, stalling just shy of the No.1 spot in the States and going Top 10 internationally.

Another single, *Bad Moon Rising*, another instant classic, followed in April. It lifted Scotty Moore's guitar lick from Elvis Presley's *I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone*, and Fogerty sang of a looming apocalypse, stuffing the song with ruinous images of hurricanes, floods and earthquakes. Its ringing rhythm and upbeat melody provided a delicious contrast.

Like its predecessor, *Bad Moon Rising* peaked at No.2 on the *Billboard* chart, although it topped charts elsewhere, most significantly in the UK. Eventually it also followed *Proud Mary* into the lexicon of popular music, inspiring covers by Jerry Lee Lewis, Bruce Springsteen, Bo Diddley, Nirvana and many more down the years.

Creedence Clearwater Revival ascended steeply. *Bayou Country*, the first of an incredible three studio albums in 1969, was a major hit at the turn of the year. It drew much of its symbolism from a fetishisation of the American South. As did its follow-up, *Green River*, released in the first week in August. The band appeared on the sleeve posed in a dappled glade, like backwoodsmen reluctantly coaxed into the open.

The immaculate title track, another huge hit single, played directly into the same idea, introducing characters such as Old Cody Junior against a backdrop of catfish, bullfrogs, and barefoot girls dancing under the moon. But Fogerty was pulling obliquely from his own childhood, transposing family visits to a Sacramento Valley creek on to an imagined bayou. Green River was the name of a favourite lime syrup.

Fogerty never seemed to rest. Songs poured out of him at an astonishing rate, the product of extreme focus and self-will.

"I was really busy, but I liked that," he recalls. "I was almost addicted to that. It might be some form of a drug produced naturally, like endorphins when you're jogging. The best part for me was sitting down and trying to write a song and maybe not coming up with anything right then, but at some point, pretty quickly, coming up with a song that wasn't there before. And it was all such a sort of mysterious process."

"We were number one in the world in record sales in 1969 and 1970. We were the first band to outsell The Beatles and to take their place."

Doug Clifford

As Creedence's star continued to rise, demand grew. In between recording sessions, rehearsals and American dates, they swiftly became staples on the burgeoning festival circuit. They played to 200,000 people at the Newport '69 Pop Festival in June, on a bill that also included the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Eric Burdon and Jethro Tull, among others. Within weeks they'd appeared at major festivals in Atlanta, Denver and Atlantic City.

"It was a rocket ride, definitely," says Cook. "Once the start button had been pressed, we might have thought we had some control over it. I guess we had a modicum of control day to day, but the larger arc of our career was pretty much out of our hands."

CCR were also one of the first acts to sign up for the Woodstock festival. As the hottest band in America, Cook believes they were used as bait to lure others. Their planned Saturday night headline slot didn't quit take place, as it turned out, due to bad weather and technical difficulties throughout the day. With the schedule already running late, CCR instead took to the stage after midnight, following the Grateful Dead.

"I think we did connect with the crowd," Cook suggests. "It was hard to tell. The audience had just suffered through the worst day of probably most of their lives with the rain, mud and lack of food, just the whole thing, the overcrowding. But they were apparently making the best of it, so it was up to us to do that as well."

John Fogerty, however, felt that CCR under-performed, leading to his insistence that the band were omitted from both the Woodstock album and Michael Wadleigh's subsequent film.

In the meantime, Creedence's hot streak continued. Fogerty had two new hit gems that appeared on a double A-sided single in October: *Down On The Corner* and *Fortunate Son*. The two couldn't have been more different. The former was a funky feelgood tune, freighted with autobiography, about a struggling four-piece (Willy And The Poor Boys) jamming on street corners. *Fortunate Son* was a raging commentary on elitism, reflecting the widening schisms in American society due to the ongoing Vietnam War. Fogerty was incensed that sons of the affluent political class were allowed to dodge the draft, while ordinary men were shipped off to South East Asia in their thousands. It remains one of his greatest songs.

Both tracks appeared on the *Willy And The Poor Boys* album a month later. It was another huge success, selling half a million copies within six weeks. *Rolling Stone* hailed CCR as the Best American Band. It was reward for an almost impossibly productive year.

"John's theory was that if we're ever off the charts, we'll be forgotten," says Clifford. "The industry tells you don't put a single out unless you're releasing an album with it. But we did that several times, to have something on the charts at all times, and that's how we did it. And it didn't seem to hurt our album sales at all. Not only did

GETTY

Calm before the storm: sound-checking at the Royal Albert Hall, April 14, 1970

"We got a fifteen-minute standing ovation [at the Albert Hall] from the British crowd and we didn't go out and do an encore." Doug Clifford

we do three albums in sixty-nine, but we also toured behind all three and some other things too, like Woodstock. We were at warp speed, but we were always straight and sober when we worked. We couldn't have done it otherwise."

The advent of a new decade seemed primed for Creedence. They started with a habitual flurry, releasing another double whammy 45 in January 1970. *Travelin' Band* was Fogerty's exuberant homage to the rock'n'rollers who'd first inspired him: Elvis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry. The flip-side, *Who'll Stop The Rain*, was more contemplative, a politically pointed song about failed promises and dashed ideals. It was another platinum seller across the globe, and CCR toasted its success with a hometown show at Oakland Coliseum at the end of the month.

By April, with the *Willy And The Poor Boys* album peaking in the UK Top 10 and two fresh classic singles in the shops – *Up Around The Bend* and *Run Through The Jungle* – the band set out to conquer Europe. The eight-date trip involved sold-out gigs in France, Germany, Holland, Denmark and Sweden, with the show at London's Royal Albert Hall undoubtedly the most prestigious.

"For me, performing live was the best part," states Fogerty. "*Born On The Bayou* was pretty good to play; I loved *Keep On Chooglin'* too. I also always loved *Suzie Q*. Those were songs where I got to stretch out a little. It just seemed like everything was working out well."

The only thing that could stop Creedence, it seemed, was themselves. Director Bob Smeaton points out that: "When those guys walked off the stage at the Royal Albert Hall they were a band of brothers. Tight as friends and tight as a band." But within the group, cracks had already started to form.

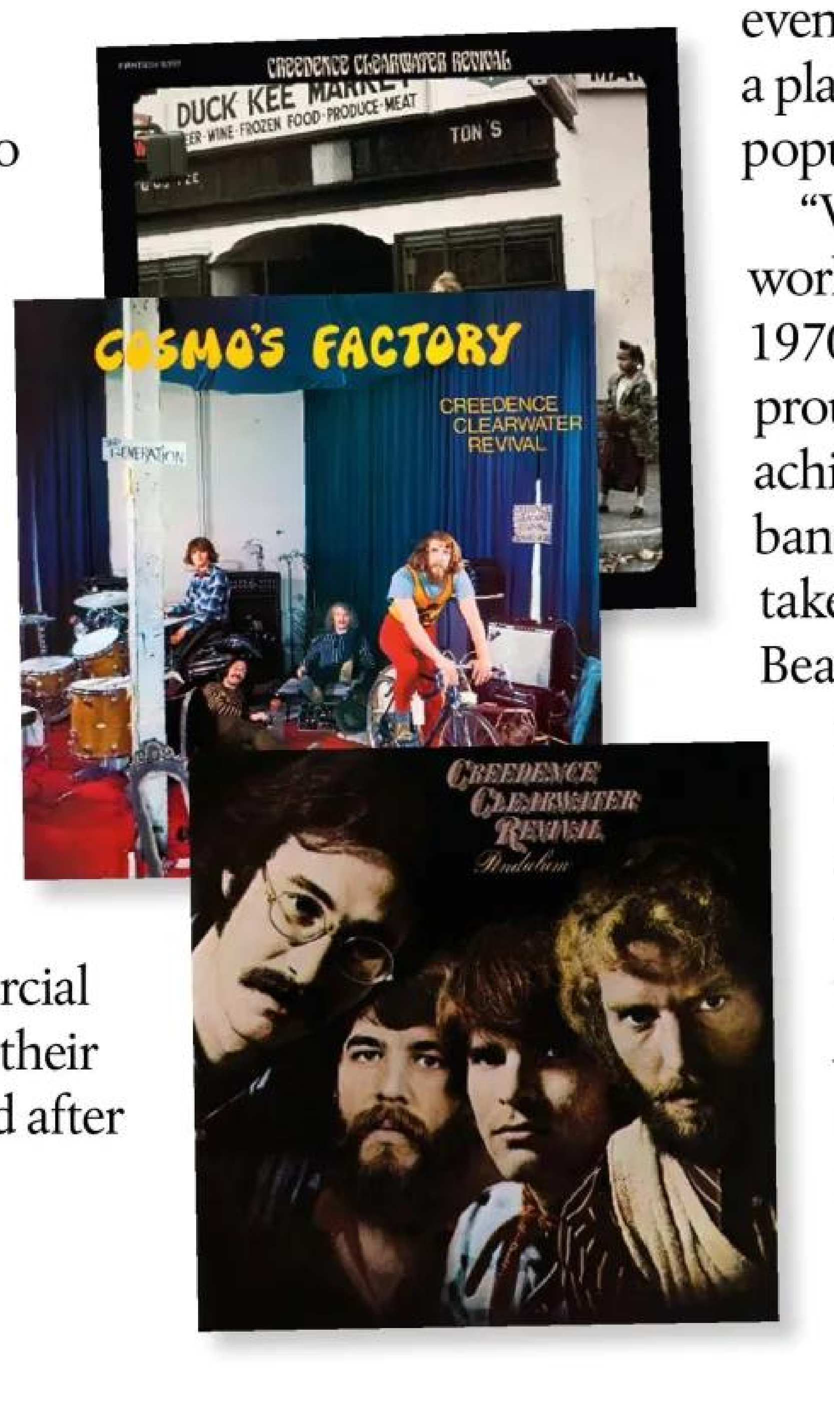
John Fogerty's iron grip on the band had been evident in his decision to veto their inclusion in the Woodstock album and film. Now, with a full house at the Albert Hall screaming for more, there was another autocratic call.

"We got a fifteen-minute standing ovation from the British crowd and we didn't go out and do an encore," Doug Clifford rues. "That was one of the things that I thought was John's type of leadership, where you punish instead of helping to change the situation or make something better. It was disingenuous. John does encores now, but that was something he took away from the band."

Creedence Clearwater Revival would reach their commercial peak in the summer of 1970 with their fifth album, *Cosmo's Factory*, named after the band's rehearsal space. It was compounded by another one, *Pendulum*, in December, by which time there was real dissension within the band. While Stu Cook, Doug Clifford and Tom Fogerty wanted more of a say in the studio, John, the younger Fogerty, stood firm. By early 1971, Tom had quit. A year later, Creedence were done completely.

The story of CCR's fall-out and collapse is a whole other tale. Ultimately, they're a band best celebrated rather than mourned. As the *At The Royal Albert Hall* album proves, theirs was one of the defining sounds of the counter-cultural era, even if they actually occupied a place somewhere closer to the popular culture.

"We were number one in the world in record sales in 1969 and 1970," says Clifford, still immensely proud of the band's many achievements. "We were the first band to outsell The Beatles and to take their place. In fairness to The Beatles, their career was starting to fade and go the other way and ours was going up like a rocket ship. But we wanted to be number one. That meant a lot to us."



At The Royal Albert Hall is out now via Craft Records.

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THE 50 GREATEST GUNS N' ROSES SONGS

And the stories behind them

Words: **Merlin Alderslade, Joe Daly, Bill DeMain, Paul Elliott, Dave Everley, Rich Hobson, Dave Ling, Ken McIntyre, Grant Moon, Paul Rees**

KMAZUR / GETTY

Izzy Stradlin and Slash at the Troubadour in LA where the *Appetite* line-up played together for the first time, on June 6, 1985.

50 Shadow Of Your Love
Single B-side, 1987

Written by Axl Rose and Izzy Stradlin during their Hollywood Rose days, along with Rose's friend and Stradlin's future sometime replacement in GN'R Paul Tobias, this is the fastest song in the GN'R canon. Originally slated for the *Live ?!*@ Suicide EP* (hence the faux crowd noise mixed onto the track) and introduced by Rose's '1-2-3-4' count-off, it proceeds over a breakneck 3:05. Rose claimed Thin Lizzy as its influence, but really *Shadow Of Your Love* owes a much greater debt to Motörhead. In fact Slash's bottleneck-guitar contortions recall ex-Lizzy man Brian Robertson's standout contributions to his solitary album with Lemmy's troops, 1983's *Another Perfect Day*. **PR**

49 You Ain't The First
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

Guns' hit the back porch with this whisky-soaked shit kicker.

Corey Taylor (Slipknot/ Stone Sour): "I know a lot of people – including myself – have huge issues with the *Use Your Illusion* albums. To me, had they trimmed the fat and consolidated it into twelve or fourteen songs, it would have been bulletproof. But there's just something about this song that makes it so good to listen to – like you can practically hear the booze in the air. When you put it on, you don't have to get warmed up to hit any of the good notes and you don't have to know all the words – it's a huge 'fuck you' to the chick that stormed out and ruined your life. To me it was a great middle ground between *GN'R Lies* and *Use Your Illusion*. You can just hear they're just hanging out – you can practically smell the smoke in the room. As a kid, that was so fun to hear that it took me out of the rest of the album. There are some great songs across those two albums, but that song in particular, I can just put it on and drive." **RH**

48 Oh My God
End Of Days OST, 1999

The GN'R that recorded this rattling slab of distorto-metal from the soundtrack to reviled Arnold Schwarzenegger movie *End Of Days* was unrecognisable, musically and physically, from the band that had dominated the first half of the 1990s. Slash, Duff and Izzy were gone, leaving Axl lord of all he surveyed. It was probably for the best – there's an unfathomable chasm between *Appetite For Destruction* and *Oh My God*. The first original Guns song in eight years, it was a shock to the system at the time but it's aged well, even if the presence of four (!) guitarists – NIN's Robin Finck, Jane's Addiction's Dave Navarro, ex-Circus Of Power man Gary Sunshine and Paul Tobias – pointed towards the overkill that would define the reconfigured Guns N' Roses. **DE**

47 Catcher In The Rye
Chinese Democracy, 2008

This intelligent, insistently melodic song opens with mellow electric guitars and piano, and Axl Rose vocalising in the reverb-soaked distance. Ahead lay darkly humorous lyrics about madness and violence, Rose drawing on his revulsion for JD Salinger's titular book, and the pernicious effect Rose thought it could have on weaker-minded souls. Most notorious among these of course was John Lennon's murderer, Mark Chapman; the song fittingly offers some pleasing, Beatlesy tribute sequences, thick with chiming piano chords and some *Hey Jude 'nah-nah-nah-nah*'s. An early version with a nixed guitar solo from Brian May isn't difficult to unearth online. **GM**

46 Chinese Democracy
Chinese Democracy, 2008

Written by Axl after he found himself moved by the final scenes in Martin Scorsese's Dalai Lama epic *Kundun*, *Chinese Democracy* was first played live a whole seven years before its namesake album finally emerged. It's no *Welcome To The Jungle* (what the hell is?), but as far as album openers go it's still a riotous, full-throttle rager, bouncing along for a breathless 4:43 minutes as bursts of noodly solos fly out all over the place. With contributions from two backing vocalists, three keyboard players (including Axl) and no fewer than five guitarists, it also might just be the record's most collaborative track. **MA**

45 Move To The City
Live ?!★@ Like A Suicide EP, 1986

A track that may as well have been marinated in sleaze, *Move To The City* repurposed Aerosmith's *Mama Kin* to recount the teenaged Axl Rose's journey from Lafayette, Indiana to Sunset Strip – wailing sirens, rumbling gutter-boogie riff, barely audible horn section and all. Another carry over from their Hollywood Rose days, it surfaced as the third track on the self-released *Live ?!*@ Like A Suicide* EP. The crowd noise, overdubbed on to the EP's tracks to excuse the band's own amateurish production, was lifted from recordings of the 1978 Texxas Jam festival, headlined by none other than a zonked-out Aerosmith and with Ted Nugent and Van Halen also on the bill. **PR**

44 Shackler's Revenge
Chinese Democracy, 2008

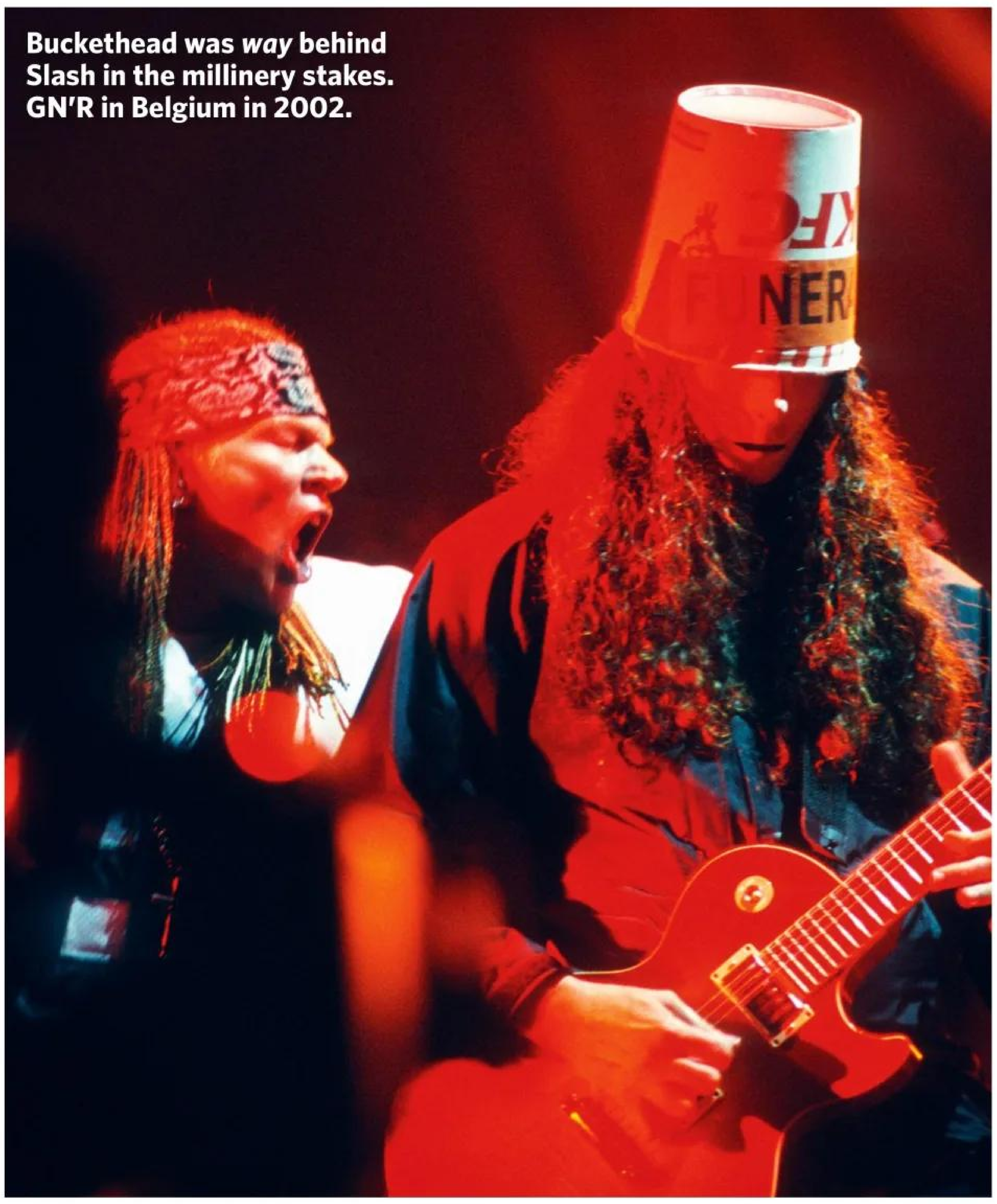
The first official *Chinese Democracy* release, owing to its inclusion in the videogame *Rock Band 2*, *Shackler's Revenge* received a lukewarm reception upon arrival. For many, its Nine Inch Nails-goes-glam-metal stylings felt at least a decade out of step with the rock scene at the time, while its unenviable standing as the first proper preview of a Slash and Duff-less Guns record had old-school fans turned off even before pressing 'Play'. Which is a shame, because on its own merit *Shackler's Revenge* is a fun ride, despite some weighty subject matter owing to the song's lyrics tackling America's school shooting epidemic. **MA**

43 I.R.S.
Chinese Democracy, 2008

Axl was talking about *I.R.S.* as far back as 2000, when he broke cover to give a rare interview to *Rolling Stone* magazine, and an early version was leaked three years later via New York Mets player Mike Piazza. That title might nod to the Inland Revenue Service, but *I.R.S.* – a mercurial mix of woe-is-me ruefulness and venomous defiance set to music that slips from stripped-down

GETTY; COREY TAYLOR: ASHLEY OSBORN/PRESS

Axl and Bumblefoot at The Forum in Inglewood, California in 2011.


Buckethead was *way* behind Slash in the millinery stakes. GN'R in Belgium in 2002.

restraint to punk-metal howl – was reputedly inspired by the barrage of lawsuits Axl faced in the 90s, not least from former wife Erin Everly and ex-girlfriend Stephanie Seymour. *'Read it, baby, with your morning news/With the sweet hangover and the headlines, too,'* sneered the singer, proving no one does 'spiteful' quite like him. **DE**

42 Right Next Door To Hell
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

GN'R needed a banger to open the first volume of their simultaneously released third and fourth albums, and this throbbing punk rocker about hard times and bad people more than fitted the bill. Coming in on Duff McKagan's trademark chorused bass, a guitar riff that's a close cousin of *Appetite For Destruction*-era album cut *Mr. Brownstone* and a born-to-do-it beat from new drummer Matt Sorum, *Right Next Door To Hell* was a co-write between Rose, Stradlin and their mate Timo Caltia, a Finnish songwriter, who supplied the chorus tune. The title alludes to Rose's 1990 fracas with a female neighbour at his luxury condominium block, after which he was arrested and then quickly released. He promptly gave away the apartment in an MTV contest, as you do. **GM**

41 Madagascar
Chinese Democracy, 2008

Grandiose and ambitious, *Madagascar* sees Rose in fine, gravelly voice and on familiar lyrical ground, vulnerable yet defiant in the face of ostracism. Musically, though, this is a development from earlier GN'R. A co-write with keyboard player Chris Pitman, and with orchestrations by Marco Beltrami, it opens with French horns, an insistent string motif, then progresses on a mid-tempo, almost trip-hop groove. It kicks up another notch when the big *Stairway To Heaven*-style guitar riff slams in, and the scale is amped up again with audio clips of Martin Luther King's 'I Have A Dream' speech, and dialogue from bleak 'outsider' movies, Vietnam war flick *Casualties Of War* and serial killer thriller *Seven* among them. **GM**

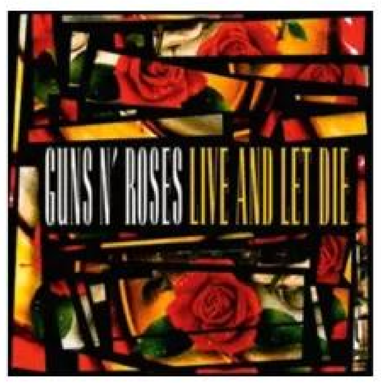
40 Back Off Bitch
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

Back Off Bitch represented revenge served cold: the song had been written by Rose in the early 80s and was a staple of GN'R's early club sets. But the take recorded for *Use Your Illusion I* found the singer spitting the lyric like his wounds were fresh ("I've found out I've had a lot of hatred for women," the singer told *Rolling Stone* in 1992). Set up by the meanest of descending licks and the singer's macabre chuckle, the track remains an outlaw classic, even if Slash admitted in 2018 that the gang-chanted chorus has grown more problematic: "Some of the songs were sort of sexist in their own way, but not to be taken that seriously." **HY**

39 Reckless Life
Live ?!★@ Like A Suicide EP, 1986

"Hey fuckers! Suck on Guns N' fuckin' Roses!" As far as first impressions go, Slash's slurred introduction to the opening track on his band's live-in-the-studio debut EP is a doozy. A turbo-charged update of an old song dating back to Rose and Stradlin's pre-GN'R band Hollywood Rose, *Reckless Life* wasn't so much a song as a manifesto: *'I lead a reckless life, and I don't need your advice,'* Axl snarled, fangs dripping with venom, over a racket that was equal parts Aerosmith, AC/DC and the Sex Pistols. GN'R may have been deep in the gutter, but they had their eyes on the stars even then. **DE**

38 Live And Let Die
Use Your Illusion I, 1991



Wings' all-time classic James Bond theme gets the never-knowingly-understated Axl Rose treatment in this epic blowout.

Luke Spiller (The Struts): "Guns' cover of *Live And Let Die* is pretty undeniable. It's taken from an album where the band were at the height of their powers and were not afraid to be completely self-indulgent, and this song is a testament to that. Not only is it a ballsy statement to cover anything by Paul McCartney (or The Beatles), but to actually nail it and give it a new edge is a real triumph.

"It's so trashy but yet so big and intentional at the same time. I'll never forget seeing the video to this song when I was just a kid, and being blown away by the look and sound of the band.

"I feel McCartney is mainly appreciated for his musical legacy, but not necessarily his vocal delivery. Axl is one of the very few people that could ever tackle a vocal like this, and he does it with such ease and finesse. Listen to this now as loud as possible and tell me it isn't brilliant." ▷

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37 Ain't It Fun
The Spaghetti Incident?, 1994

The Spaghetti Incident? is GN'R's love letter to their punk influences. Here they enlisted another inspiration, Hanoi Rocks' Michael Monroe, to pay tribute to US hooligans Dead Boys and their late singer Stiv Bators.

Michael Monroe: "I first met Axl when he happened to stop by the video shoot for my song *Dead, Jail Or Rock'N'Roll* [1989] in Midtown Manhattan. He came up and introduced himself and turned out to be a really nice guy, so we got along great. Guns N' Roses always acknowledged that Hanoi Rocks had influenced them. Axl told me that Izzy used to tell him: 'Do your hair like Michael Monroe.' I saw a little bit of that in some of their early photos and the *Welcome To The Jungle* video, but Axl has always had his own unique style.

"Axl mentioned to me on the phone that he was not that familiar with the Dead Boys material, so I made him a tape of their first two albums. I gave it to him when I got to LA for the *Use Your Illusion* sessions [Monroe appeared on the song *Bad Obsession*]. We were driving around Hollywood in Axl's car, listening to that tape, and when *Ain't It Fun* came on, Axl said: 'Wow, this a great song! We've gotta record this for our covers album. We'll do it as a duet, you and me.' He immediately called Slash and said let's get the band together, we're covering this Dead Boys song…

"The recording of the song was magical. Stiv [Bators, Dead Boys frontman, who died in 1990] was definitely there in spirit. When Stiv and me used to record vocals in the studio, Stiv had this ritual in which he placed a bunch of burning candles in a circle around me and had me sing the vocal inside the 'protective' circle . So me and Axl collected all the candles we could find in the studio and made a circle of them around us. We were placed facing each other. Then we lit up the candles and sang the song face to face. In some parts Axl even sounds just like Stiv. I remember thinking that they had the same kind of voodoo.

"I didn't ask for money for doing *Ain't It Fun*. So many people saw dollar signs and got greedy when it came to Guns N' Roses, which I found quite obnoxious. All I asked was to have 'In memory of Stiv Bators' in the album credits and to spell my name right. Axl replied: 'Yes, of course!' I was so happy that I was able to do this for my late, dear friend, and to raise awareness of Stiv Bators and the Dead Boys. Now millions of their fans could see Stiv's name and hopefully find out more about him." **DE**

Having *Fun*: Axl Rose and Michael Monroe.

36 If The World
Chinese Democracy, 2008

Layering flourishes of flamenco guitar, hazy strings, a funky drum beat, crunching, metallic riffs and dubby bass lines in the first 90 seconds alone, *If The World* is a typically stuffed *Chinese Democracy* cut, yet it's all engaging and oddly charming enough that it works. Rose's lyrics dabble in classically bittersweet romantic fare as he croons and cries his way through a song that climaxes in a woozy, dreamy guitar solo amid bursts of orchestral pomp. It's immediately overshadowed by *There Was A Time* (more on that later), but *If The World* is an impressive composition all the same. **MA**

35 Absurd
Single, 2021

The first new Guns N' Roses song in 13 years was nothing of the sort. In a previous life, *Absurd* was called *Silkworm*. Written and recorded for *Chinese Democracy*, and even played live under its original name, this distorted electo-metal hand grenade of a song bore testament to Axl's love of industrial music – so much so that it was deemed too far out to be included on the album. It was mothballed until the pandemic, when Slash and Duff McKagan re-recorded the guitar and bass for an updated version. Rose's vivid, bad-trip lyrics – *'Pussy full of maggots, isn't that absurd?'* – take aim at some unknown antagonist. Even now, it sounds like nothing else they've done. **DE**

34 Dust N' Bones
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

Izzy Stradlin was the Keith Richards of Guns N' Roses, the cool rhythm guitarist who sung like he was about to nod out. On the *Illusion* albums (unlike *Appetite*), Izzy sang lead on a couple of numbers. Those were his songs, where GN'R sounded more like the Rolling Stones: less hard rock, more rock'n'roll. *Dust N' Bones*, the second track on *Use Your Illusion I*, followed the manic *Right Next Door To Hell* with a mean swagger. Izzy's delivery was perfect as he drawled nonchalantly: *'She loved him yesterday, he laid her sister/She said okay, and that's all right.'* And in the parts where Axl sang with him, snarling about *'cold'* women, it's as sleazy as Guns N' Roses ever sounded. **PE**

33 Dead Horse
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

There's a pervasive narrative out there about grunge's casual nihilism killing off the party-hearty decadence of the glam era. Except GN'R were way ahead of the game when it came to casual nihilism, as evidenced by *Dead Horse*'s biting opening line: *'Sick of this*

MICHAEL MONROE (INSET): KEVIN NIXON; MAIN: ANNAMARIA DISANTO/ICONICPIX

life, not that you care'. Written entirely by Axl, *Dead Horse* opens with a minute-long acoustic intro before exploding into one of *Illusion*'s more hard-driving songs. At their best, GN'R sounded like the New York Dolls with a hundred million dollars in their pocket. This was one of those times. **KM**

32 You're Crazy
Appetite For Destruction, 1987 / GN'R Lies, 1988

Axl berates an ex- for being completely fucking bonkers (pot, kettle?!) The song was later reworked in acoustic fashion on *GN'R Lies*.

Josh Todd (Buckcherry): "You know what? I like the acoustic version of *You're Crazy* from the *Lies* record best. I don't know that this is the truth, but when I hear that acoustic version I feel like it's the original way they wanted that song to come across. I love the words and the groove, and I think it's better slowed down like that. It swings, and it's way nastier because of where he's singing it. I really love Axl's low register. That's probably my favourite GN'R track. I think it's sick. It's just so mean. Axl is such an interesting character. He intimidated me, and that's what I loved about my favourite rock singers: girls wanted to fuck them, and guys wanted to be them. Axl was one of those guys. I just thought: 'He's real.'" **HY**

31 Better
Chinese Democracy, 2008

Whether you enjoyed *Chinese Democracy* for what it was, or find its very existence to be nothing less than blasphemous, most fans at least seem to be able to agree on one thing: *Better* is an absolute banger.

Written in the early 00s by Axl and Robin Finck and played live in 2006 and 2007, the song was practically familiar by the time it appeared on the record. Luckily it absolutely slams, riding along on some seriously chunky riffs that Slash brought an extra edge to when playing the song live upon his return to the fold. **MA**

30 Get In The Ring
Use Your Illusion II, 1991

In case anyone thought the *Illusion*-era Gunners had grown too soft, there was *II*'s seething fifth track, serving as a hard-rock soapbox from which Rose could strafe his perceived persecutors in the rock press. Written by Duff McKagan, originally titled *Why Do You Look At Me When You Hate Me?* and produced to give the bogus impression of a live show, *Get In The Ring* was GN'R at their rabble-rousing best. The moment when the lazy, bluesy intro kicks into double time can still thrill, but it's the singer's machine-gun rant – tearing into journos from *Kerrang!*, *Hit Parader*, *Spin* and *Circus* – that made the song notorious. **HY**

The *Appetite For Destruction* line-up: (l-r) Axl Rose, Slash, Steven Adler, Duff McKagan, Izzy Stradlin.

29 Pretty Tied Up
Use Your Illusion II, 1991

It was as if Izzy Stradlin had sensed what was coming, such was the prescience in his lyrics to *Pretty Tied Up*, from the opening line – *'The perils of rock'n'roll decadence'* – to the wry observation: *'Once there was this rock'n'roll band rolling on the streets/Time went by and it became a joke'*. All of this from a guy who had quit drugs, and, tired of the circus around them, was about to quit the band. And while Izzy wrote the words, it was Axl who sang them. But while the subtext was complicated, the song itself was simple. As its title implied, *Pretty Tied Up* was the true-life story of a girl Izzy knew who worked as a dominatrix. And Guns N' Roses played it just right – down and dirty. **PE**

28 Yesterdays
Use Your Illusion II, 1991

There was little of the *Appetite*-era venom in this light country strum, with its rippling piano and a lyric that seemed to suggest rising above old grudges (*'Some things could be better if we'd all just let them be'*). And yet, even if you questioned its motives, *Yesterdays*' sunbeam of melody proved the perfect partner to *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* during the mellow run on *Illusion II*'s first side. "We had lost a little bit of the mayhem and punk rock," Slash wrote in his autobiography. "That was a good or a bad thing, depending on who you asked." **HY**

27 Knockin' On Heaven's Door
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

Guns N' Roses repackaged Bob Dylan's low-key 1973 hymnal for the hard-rock masses by doubling its length and dialling up the histrionics. They debuted it live at their first ever show at London's Marquee, in 1987, before chucking a studio version on the soundtrack of the 1990 racing movie *Days Of Thunder* starring Tom Cruise. After the song reappeared in slightly tweaked form on *Use Your Illusion II* (the new *'sniffin' your own rank subjugation, Jack'* interlude came courtesy of Axl's actor/director buddy Josh Richman), it became the definitive version for anyone who wasn't a Dylan fan. Dylan gave GN'R a papal blessing of sorts in 2009: when asked what he thought of them, he said they were "one of the best rock bands there's ever been." Bob wasn't wrong. **DE**

26 Used To Love Her
GN'R Lies, 1988

What if Buddy Holly had sung about killing Peggy Sue? That's the vibe of this black-humoured ditty that tumbles along on three chords and a wink. Given Axl Rose's stormy history with relationships, it was tempting to think *Used To Love Her* drew from real life. But Izzy Stradlin told *Superstar Facts* that the song was inspired by a "whining, self-pitying" tune he heard on the radio. "We rewrote it with a better ending," he said.

Of course, it wouldn't be a GN'R song without some controversy surrounding it – in the early 2000s it appeared as evidence in two separate murder cases, as supposed motivation for the killings. **BDM**

MAIN: NEIL ZLOZOWER / ATLAS ICONS; JOSH TODD: JEREMY SAFFER

Guns N' Roses with Alice Cooper and Kane Roberts of the Alice Cooper Band, Chicago, 1987.

25 The Garden
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

A slice of psychedelic sleaze featuring a sneering guest spot from Alice Cooper (returning the favour after GN'R teamed up with him for a cover of *Under My Wheels* a few years earlier). If it was any other band, you'd wonder what the hell they were on. But this was Guns N' Roses, so it's pretty safe to say 'everything'.

Alice Cooper: "We took Guns N' Roses on their first tour, and the very first night, after they played, I told my band: "We'd better be very good tonight." They had the attitude, the sound, the swagger. I had to send somebody out for bail money on that tour because one or two of them were in jail. So we were kinda like their big brothers and they knew they could call me any time.

"With *The Garden*, Axl called me at two in the morning: 'Can you come over to the studio?' I said: 'Sure, I'll be over, but I can't spend three days doing it.' When I came in, the scene in the studio was very clean. Axl was there, and maybe Slash or Duff, and everything was ready to go. The lyrics were there. I listened to the song three times and said: 'No problem'. Axl didn't have to describe what *The Garden* was about. Being a lyricist, I saw where they were going with it. I got the imagery. To me, 'the garden' was where you go to pick the drugs you want. To give Guns N' Roses credit, as dysfunctional as they were at points, they really had clever ideas. Like any hard rock band, they were blues-based, and *The Garden* starts out like a more modernistic take on that, with the psychedelia coming through in the lyrics. But it was still a very 'street' sound.

"Slash has said Axl had been trying to sing like me and they decided to get the real thing. There's a certain amount of cynicism and dark humour in what I do. I think that's why they wanted me on the song – they wanted it a little sinister. They just said: 'Do it the way you would do it.'

"Axl might have given me a couple of pointers but we nailed it pretty quickly – in two or three takes – and I was surprised when he went: 'Yeah, that sounds great.' I didn't hang out afterwards. I just said: 'Guys, I know you're gonna stay up for three days, so I'm gonna go home'. We could laugh about that, because they understood I'd been there once, too.

"I've sung a lot of different bits with a lot of different people, but it's always great to be on a classic album. *Use Your Illusion* is not just another album. It's an album that will go down in history."

24 This I Love
Chinese Democracy, 2008

The penultimate track of *Chinese Democracy* finds Axl Rose in full-on power ballad mode. Movie music maestro Marco Beltrami handled the lush orchestrations, with strings, woodwinds, piano, and a Slash-channelling guitar solo from Bumblefoot among the sounds underpinning the singer's pained, heartfelt vocal – one of his best – about a lost love that just won't die. It was written in the early 90s, purportedly about Rose's ex-fiancée, supermodel Stephanie Seymour. Their relationship was tempestuous, and the song is suitably freighted with pain, regret, torment. Rose described it as one of the heaviest things he'd ever done, and he wasn't kidding. **GM**

23 Out Ta Get Me
Appetite For Destruction, 1987

In 1986, A&R men were sniffing around the band's door – a door broken down that year by the LAPD, as they sought Axl Rose to answer for – as Duff McKagan put it in his memoir – "a bogus rape charge" (which was subsequently dropped). McKagan was terrified that such scrapes with the law would deter the labels. Fat chance, with a riff and chorus as hooky as the one on here. The F-bombs fly in their defiant, paranoid, and rocking tale of hidin' out and layin' low, with GN'R playing the role of persecuted rock'n'roll outlaws to perfection. How could we resist? **GM**

22 Double Talkin' Jive
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

It's no easy feat to play the tough guy while dressed in hot pants and a tuxedo jacket while smoking from a fancy cigarette holder, but Axl pulled it off when he sang *Double Talkin' Jive* during a televised show in Paris in 1992. It was Izzy's song, but Axl turned it into a vendetta against Warren Beatty, the actor who had briefly dated Axl's ex-girlfriend Stephanie Seymour.

Axl also expanded the song's title to *Double Talkin' Jive Motherfucker*, adding extra emphasis to what was already the most badass thing on the *Illusion* records. With the band blasting away, Izzy's voice sounded suitably twisted as he recounted his experiences of being '*fucked up and outta place*'. The surprise coda with rolling thunder fading into gentle acoustic guitars only added to the whacked-out vibe. **PE**

21 Think About You
Appetite For Destruction, 1987

Even *Appetite*'s supposed second-tier songs were better than most band's prime cuts. *Think About You* is a case in point. Written primarily by Izzy Stradlin in early 1985, a couple of months before Gun N' Roses officially formed, and earmarked for an aborted debut EP, its rocket-fuelled chug disguises an uncharacteristic tenderness. The object of the guitarist's affections was his then-girlfriend Monique Lewis (aka Angela Nicoletti), a booker at the Roxy club who other members

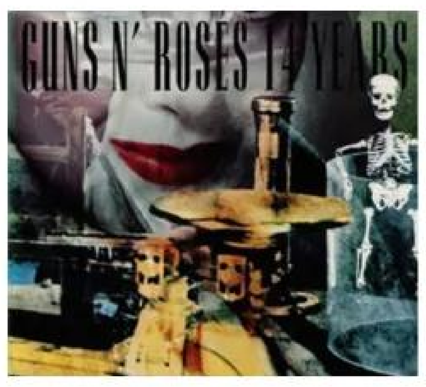
MAIN: GETTY; ALICE COOPER: JENNY RISHER/PRESS

of the band were reportedly besotted with – it's her face that Axl Rose has tattooed on his arm. Bonus fact: Lewis would go on to marry Hanoi Rocks guitarist Andy McCoy. **DE**

20 Breakdown
Use Your Illusion II, 1991

One of the really deep cuts from *Use Your Illusion II*, *Breakdown* is also one of Axl's most underrated songs, written by him alone, and with a flavour all its own. He'd whistled on the ballad *Patience*, a huge hit in 1989, and did so again in the intro to *Breakdown*, in the manner of a milkman doing the rounds. And yet from this nonchalant opening came a song of real depth, based on a piano riff and stretching out over seven minutes as Axl meditated on rebellion, isolation and a love gone bad: *'Funny how everything was Roses when we held on to the Guns.'* The ending, with Axl reciting a speech from the cult 1971 movie *Vanishing Point*, is weirdly brilliant. **PE**

19 14 Years
Use Your Illusion I, 1991



What *Dust N' Bones* was to *Use Your Illusion I*, so *14 Years* was to *Use Your Illusion II* – the great Izzy Stradlin song that proved he was the rock'n'roll heart of Guns N' Roses. This one was co-written with Axl, and again, as with *Dust N' Bones*, they sing together in the chorus.

But really, the vibe in *14 Years* is all about Izzy, the way he sings it, and the way his guitar drives the swinging boogie. In contrast to such epic blow-outs as *November Rain* and *Estranged*, it's all so simple, and so effortlessly cool. Izzy went on to make more great stuff like this on his first solo record, *Izzy Stradlin And The Ju Ju Hounds* – the second-best rock'n'roll album of 1992 after The Black Crowes' *The Southern Harmony And Musical Companion*. **PE**

Dynamic duo: Axl and Slash get in the ring in 1991.

GEORGE CHIN/ICONICPIX

18 There Was A Time
Chinese Democracy, 2008

There Was A Time is about a relationship gone wrong, although exactly who the song is about remains a mystery. It's been suggested that Axl wrote it about his turbulent relationship with Stephanie Seymour, while others think certain missives in the lyrics are aimed at Slash ('There Was A Time' = 'T.W.A.T.'). *'I was the one who gave you everything, the one who took the fall,'* Axl moans. Is he talking about taking the blame for Guns N' Roses' implosion? Either way, what's not in question is that *There Was A Time* is a top-tier Axl composition. Opening with a choral and orchestral flourish that could have come straight out of a *Lion King* pre-credits (well, he does love his Elton), the song builds to a stirring crescendo featuring swells of strings, a searing but not too flashy solo, and a mighty yelp from our flame-haired diva, nailing those *'I would do anyyyyythiiiing for youuuuuuu!'*s in fine style. **MA**

17 Don't Damn Me
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

Don't Damn Me is a crucial snapshot of a band defiantly holding their ground. They were banging out a song a day, so naturally some of them are a little undercooked. Aside from a bracing, thrashy riff from Slash halfway through, *Don't Damn Me* just sounds like the guitarist absent-mindedely warming up, and Axl's delivery here can only be described as bitch-slap rappin'.

But lyrically this is one of Axl's most insightful and (gasp!) self-aware moments on either album. *Don't Damn Me* is fiercely defiant song about sticking to one's principles, lines like *'Your only validation is in living your own life, and vicarious existence is a fucking waste of time'* read like The Ballad of Axl W Rose, Poet Laureate of The Teenage Wasteland, and *'How can I ever satisfy you?'* is probably the most important line of the dude's whole career. He's still trying to answer it. **KM**

16 My Michelle
Appetite For Destruction, 1987

The song that opens *Appetite For Destruction*'s second side is a seemingly vicious, vituperative take-down of a strung-out Sunset Strip wild child: *'You stay out late at night and you do your coke for free,'* Axl sneers over a syringe-sharp riff, *'Driving your friends crazy with your life's insanity.'*

Except that's not the full story. 'Michelle' was Michelle Young, a school friend of Slash and Steven Adler. Young was driving Axl to a gig when Elton John's *Your Song* came on the radio. "I said I wished someone would write a beautiful song for me," she told *Spin*. The singer obliged, though his original, "sappy" lyrics were ditched for altogether more brutal ones. Young's dad did work in the porn industry, her mum was dead, and she was a drug user, but Axl sang the song with a weird kind of fondness, no less heartfelt in his own way than Elton had been on the song that inspired it. Young thought so: she'd later called this unlikely tribute "My Song". **DE**

Just another day in the glare of the spotlight: Slash and Duff.

15 Locomotive
Use Your Illusion II, 1991

Shacking up with fellow addict Izzy Stradlin in a Hollywood Hills rental proved surprisingly productive for Slash. The heroin-soaked guitarist not only emerged from the stopover with the epic *Coma* ,but also partnered his housemate to write a second marathon number.

Led out by a militaristic Sorum drumbeat with all the momentum of the title, *Locomotive*'s first curve ball was McKagan's funk-metal bass line, setting up a scritch-scratch guitar riff that nodded more to LA's new breed like Jane's Addiction than to Slash's touchstones of the 70s.

According to former manager Doug Goldstein, Rose was furious at being sidelined creatively ("I'd get these phone calls from the studio: 'Have you heard this song *Locomotive* yet? How the fuck am I supposed to write lyrics to this shit?'"). Yet the singer channelled his frustration into a seething shoot-from-the-lip vocal that nods to the album title: *'You can use your illusion, let it take you where it may…'* **HY**

14 Don't Cry
Use Your Illusion I & II, 1991

Written by Axl and Izzy during the earliest days of Guns N' Roses, *Don't Cry* was not included on *Appetite For Destruction* because the band felt that one ballad was enough, and that *Sweet Child O' Mine* was better. That decision made sense. Less so the inclusion of two versions of *Don't Cry* on *Use Your Illusion I* and *II*, especially as these versions were not much different except for the lyrics.

But a great song is a great song – in this case, two great songs. And while *November Rain* was, in every sense, the big ballad on the *Illusion* albums, *Don't Cry* is subtler, darker, and possesses a deep emotional power, and a doozy of a solo from Slash. **PE**

13 Mr. Brownstone
Appetite For Destruction, 1987

Don't do drugs, kids. GN'R's ode to smack goes from glamorous lifestyle documentary to cautionary tale. When Axl threatened to fire the rest of the band on stage at a show in 1989, this was the song he referenced.

Scott Holiday (Rival Sons): "I am a true blue, OG Guns N' Roses fan. And by that I mean I was a kid when they came out. They hit me and my friends like such a breath of fresh air, which sounds ironic because they were so fucking dirty! And that's what we liked. Warrant, Poison and Slaughter and these kinds of bands were like the kings of MTV. And then here comes Guns N' Roses. The first time they played live on MTV… Axl looked like a homeless person. His teeth were just dirty. They just looked real, and I remember standing up in front of the TV and going: 'Oh my God…' and feeling all tingly. I thought: 'I love this band. This connects with my heart. These guys are dirty like the Stones. Izzy over there – that guy is dirty. He looks like Keith Richards. And the dude with the hair – Slash! He's shredding and he's not tapping!' I lived on *Appetite*, and I think one of the greatest riffs on that record is *Mr. Brownstone*. It's incredible, it's seminal and it's important. I love that track." **JD**

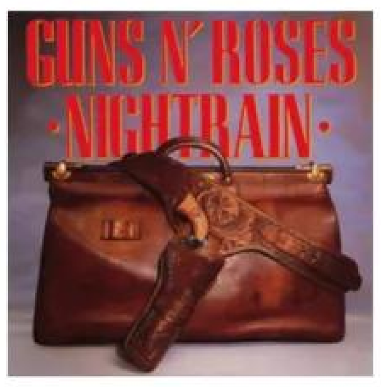
12 Coma
Use Your Illusion I, 1991

While *Rocket Queen* had hinted that GN'R could handle a long-form finale, *Use Your Illusion I*'s parting shot went further, sprawling to a prog-worthy 10 minutes, with enough ideas to sustain it. Principally written by Slash "in my heroin delirium", reality receded and time felt elastic during *Coma*, which opened with the thump of a defibrilliator and saw Rose's OD-confessional lyric decorated with phasing effects, bestial growls and background ER babble ("Okay, we're starting to lose this guy…").

Meanwhile, *Coma*'s final straight stood amongst *Illusion*'s finest moments, with one of Slash's most melodic solos setting up Axl's rapid-fire stream-of-consciousness-sounding outro, his dying yelp dovetailing with a wail of feedback, before the final coffin nail was banged in by a brutal thump on Sorum's snare.

Performed live only a handful of times before the reunion, for obvious reasons, *Coma* is all the more exhilarating for being a relative rarity. **HY**

11 Nightrain
Appetite For Destruction, 1987



There just haven't been many other debut albums with first sides as strong as *Appetite For Destruction*'s, and from its cowbell count-in this rough-hewn diamond is one of the highlights on it. The title is drawn from the band's early love for low-cost, 18 per cent ABV wine Nightrain, which regularly got them loaded like a freight train and flyin' like an aeroplane. Cool rock lyrics involving *'rattlesnake suitcases'* and *'mean machines'* are allied with a perfectly sleazy, low-slung riff, melodic twin-guitar hook and an irresistible chorus.

The song was cobbled together by Slash and Stradlin on the floor of their rehearsal room, with Rose pitching in later. They say success has many fathers, and Kiss's Paul Stanley claims he suggested the part that should be that (helluva) chorus. But as with all the best GN'R songs there's something intangible, beyond the music itself, that adds to the atmosphere. Before Stradlin and Slash trade solos (notably free of the post-Van Halenisms of the period), Rose sings *'I'm on the Nightrain, never to return'*, and the line reeks of authenticity.

At their best this band conveyed rock'n'roll oblivion and edge with more conviction than any of their LA Strip contemporaries could muster. From theme to delivery, this is peak GN'R in glorious, four-minute-and-28-seconds microcosm. **GM** ▷

ROSS HALFIN

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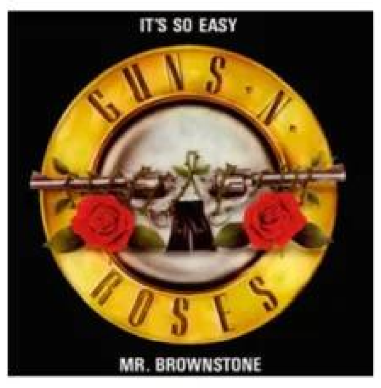
The *Use Your Illusion* line-up: (clockwise from top left) Axl Rose, Matt Sorum, Izzy Stradlin, Slash, Dizzy Reed, Duff McKagan.

10 It's So Easy
Appetite For Destruction, 1987



'Why don't you just… fuck off!' GN'R's punk roots show on this *Appetite* rager, inspired by the haters who had it in for Axl even before he became famous.

Ricky Warwick (Black Star Riders/ The Almighty): "The first time I heard *It's So Easy* I thought: 'Hang on a minute, have Hanoi Rocks made a new album?' It had such swagger. It was metal but it was punk rock as well. There was a connection early on because The Almighty's demos fell into Axl Rose's hands. He sent a message to our management saying how much he liked it. We played The Cathouse [in LA in 1990], where we met Del James who had been Axl's tour manager since day one, which strengthened the connection.

"I hung out with them a couple of times on the *Use Your Illusion* tour, but I didn't play with GN'R until a 2012 tour when I was with Thin Lizzy. You hear those stories, but I've nothing but good things to say about the guy. We were treated brilliantly, and Axl made time to come and hang out with us. There was one great night in Birmingham drinking Jägermeister during which we had a lot of great laughs." **DL**

9 Patience
GN'R Lies, 1988

Like *Sweet Child O' Mine* before it, *Patience* was written by Axl Rose for his future wife Erin Everly, daughter of the Everly Brothers' Don. Done in a single session, it has the on-the-fly air of a snatched demo. Rose's mostly reined-in vocal is set to the backdrop of loosely strummed acoustic guitars. Portentously, drummer Steven Adler was sidelined. Slash's picked solo at 3:25 nods at Mick Taylor's interjections on the Rolling Stones' 1971 classic *Wild Horses*. The more strident coda is rounded off by a wailing Rose stretching the word 'time' to seven seconds.

Released as a single in April 1989, *Patience* was a Top 5 US hit. Rose's and Everly's union proved less successful. Having met at a party when model Everly was 19, they got married in a Las Vegas chapel on April 28, 1990. Rose filed for divorce after four months, then reconciled with Everly, only to have their marriage annulled in January 1991. "Erin and I treated each other like crap," he later observed. "We messed up each other's lives completely." **PR**

8 You Could Be Mine
Use Your Illusion II, 1991

Guns N' Roses were labelled 'The Most Dangerous Band In The World', and musically speaking *You Could Be Mine* might just be the most dangerous they ever sounded. It's a sneering, antagonistic, edge-of-your-seat rager, packing less-than apologetic

GETTY x3; RICKY WARWICK: ROBERT JOHN/PRESS

lyrics allegedly written in the wake of Izzy Stradlin's faltering relationship with Angela Nicoletti. *'When I come home late at night, don't ask me where I've been,"* Axl snarls. *'Just count your stars I'm home again.'*

A feminist anthem this ain't, but it captures the wild and remorseless monster that was GN'R in their earliest years. No surprise, perhaps, given that the song was originally written around the *Appetite For Destruction* sessions (the *'bitch slap rappin"* line famously first appeared inside the *Appetite* album sleeve). Add to that the fact that the song is inexorably linked to James Cameron's classic action sequel *Terminator 2* thanks to its inclusion in the soundtrack (and Arnie's brilliant cameo in the track's promotional video), and you have a perfect slice of early-90s pop culture, wrapped up in one all-time great rocker. **MA**

7 Civil War

Use Your Illusion II, 1991

Hardly nuanced with its anti-war sentiment, *Civil War* is nonetheless GN'R's most finely detailed epic. Born from a riff Slash recycled at soundchecks during the latter stages of the *Appetite For Destruction* world tour, the band drilled it into shape prior to playing two shows in Australia in December 1988. The recorded version first appeared on the George Harrison-compiled 1990 charity album *Nobody's Child: Romanian Angel Appeal*, and was later repurposed to open *Use Your Illusion II* at a slow burn.

It begins with a sample of Strother Martin's prisoner governor's speech to Paul Newman's titular convict from the 1967 movie masterpiece *Cool Hand Luke* ("What we have here is failure to communicate…"), and has Rose whistling the American Civil War-era folk song *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*. Rose's mourning piano and vocal – *'Look at your young men fighting…'* – is stalked by layered electric guitars.

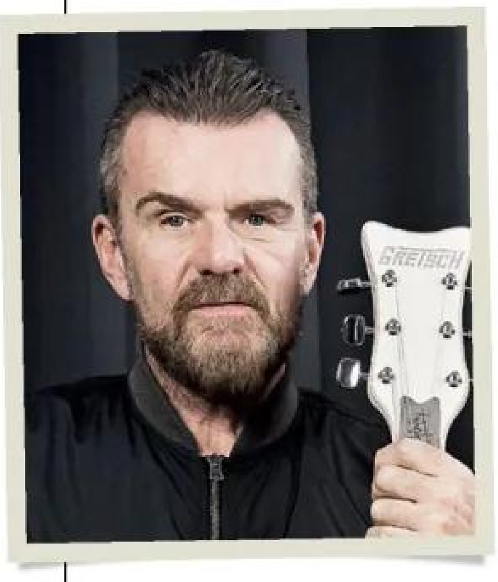
At 1:19, Slash's scything guitar and Adler's drums kick in, with Rose switching to his hellion howl. *Civil War* ebbs and crests for near five more minutes, beseeching verses, roared choruses. Rose cites the assassinations of Martin Luther King and JFK and quotes the manifesto of Peru's Shining Path guerrilla army. Slash plays up a storm. The concluding 1:38 breaks down to a rolling piano line and Stones-y riffing, paired with a sampled thunderstorm and yet more whistling from Rose. Adler's only recorded contribution to the *Use Your Illusion* albums, this was the last GN'R track he played on. **PR**

6 Paradise City

Appetite For Destruction, 1987

If *Welcome The Jungle* presented LA as a dog-eat-dog gladiatorial arena, its *Appetite For Destruction* counterpart flipped the script. Here, the City Of Angels is an aspirational fantasy playground for down-on-their-luck rockers dreaming of green grass and pretty girls. Rarely has debauchery sounded so damn Californian.

GN'R at NYC's Madison Square Garden, 2017. We'd bet money that they're playing *November Rain* in this photo.



Billy Duffy (The Cult): "*Paradise City* has it all! From the moment I got turned away from a sold-out Marquee club in London, for a band I'd not heard of but had been encouraged to see by my partner in crime, to having them as special guests on a Cult American tour in 1987, to special-guesting for them a few times once they had become a huge band, one thing remained constant: Guns N' Roses have always been totally and utterly authentic, the real deal. A true legendary American rock'n'roll band from that great lineage – as real off stage as on it. They lived it as they played it out on stage. Even if they had not remained friends to this day I'd have always had the greatest respect for these guys and always will." **DE**

5 Rocket Queen

Appetite For Destruction, 1987

The last track on *Appetite For Destruction* is essentially two killer songs for the price of one. The first is a blast of snake-hipped rock'n'roll with an uncharacteristically funky undercurrent (Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist John Frusciante claimed Axl told him Guns were trying to copy his own band). The second is an escalating, heartfelt tribute to the Rocket Queen of the title: Axl's friend Barbi Von Greif, who by all accounts acted as a one-woman support system through some tough time.

But it's the bit that joins the two parts that sealed *Rocket Queen*'s notoriety. The groans and squeals that erupt as Slash peals off a fluid solo aren't staged; Axl persuaded one of the band's friends, Adriana Dawn Smith, to have full sex with him in the recording booth while the tape rolled (the fact that Smith was Steven Adler's fiancée didn't seem to trouble him). "Apparently there was three and a half hours of audio on the reel-to-reel," Smith told *Classic Rock* in 2007, adding that she "directed" the coitus. The greatest debut album of the decade had got the climax it deserved. **DE**

4 November Rain

Use Your Illusion I, 1991

November Rain was Axl Rose's magnum opus – a song he sat on for five years, waiting for the right moment to unleash it on an unsuspecting public. When it did emerge, as the centrepiece of *Use Your Illusion I*, this grandiose, six-tier wedding cake of a song was simultaneously admired as a mark of the singer's ambition and ridiculed as a testament to his supposed hubris.

Axl said he was inspired to write it after seeing Tommy Lee play on Mötley Crüe's 1985 hit *Home Sweet Home*. Guns recorded a 10-minute solo-piano demo with producer Manny Charlton in 1986, which sounds remarkably close to the finished article ("That one's for the second album," Axl told Charlton – accurately, as it turned out). The song's lyrics were based on a short story about a man who loses his girlfriend to suicide, written by the singer's buddy Del James.

The finished track, clocking in at an emotional eight minutes and 57 seconds, was a behemoth, nodding to both *Funeral For A Friend/Love Lies Bleeding* by Axl's idol Elton John and, in its glorious coda, Derek And The Dominos' *Layla*. The track, and its $1.5 million video, was so shamelessly opulent and over-the-top that even the corrosive cynicism of grunge couldn't hole it beneath the waterline. But it also highlighted the gulf that had opened up between Axl and his bandmates in terms of what GN'R had been and what they could be. *November Rain* may have been written about the death of a relationship, but it sounded the death knell for the original incarnation of Guns N' Roses. **DE** ▷

MAIN: GETTY; BILLY DUFFY: WILL IRELAND

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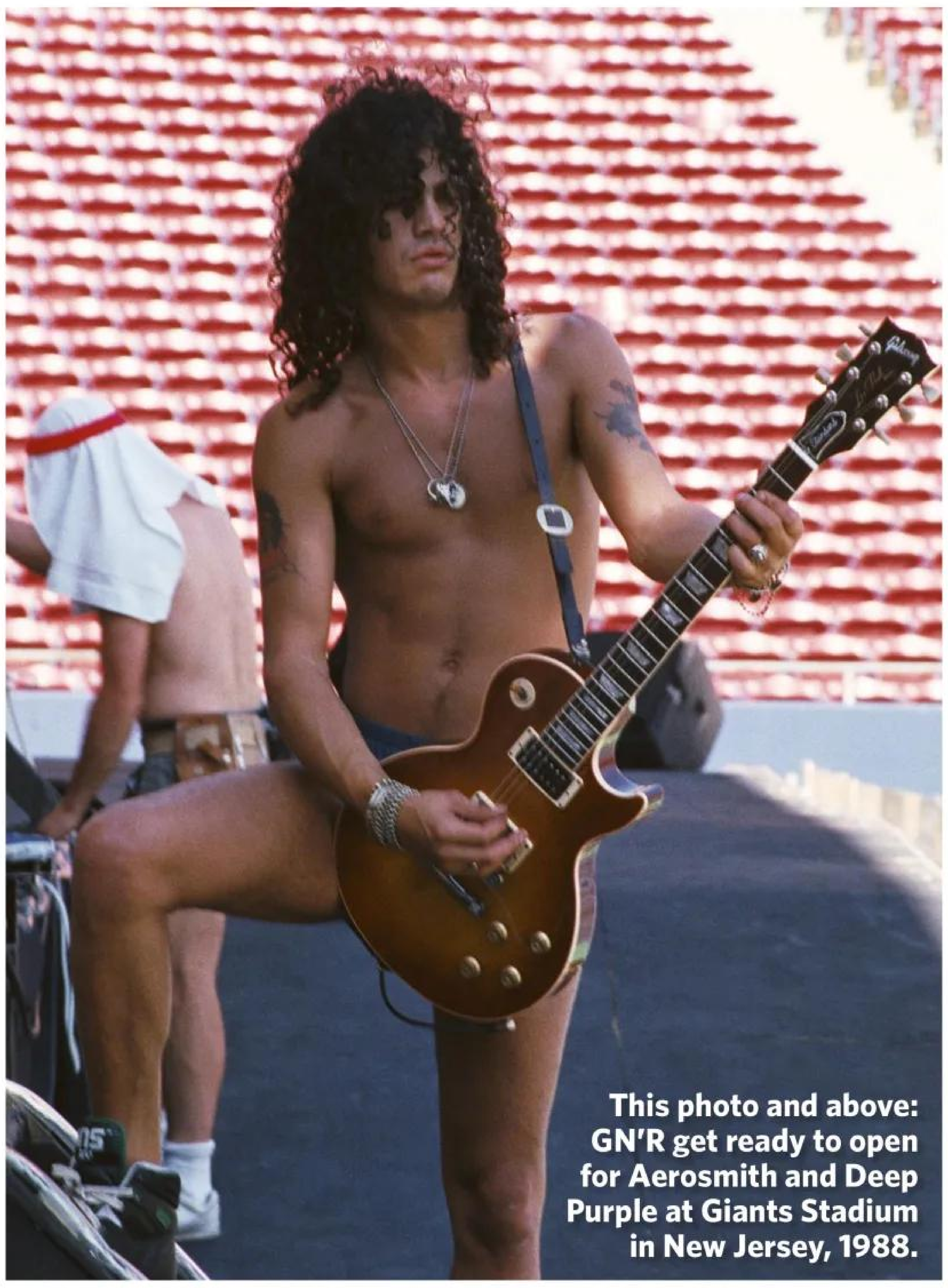


This photo and above: GN'R get ready to open for Aerosmith and Deep Purple at Giants Stadium in New Jersey, 1988.

The second gig by the *Appetite* line-up, at the Stardust Ballroom in LA, June 28, 1985.

3 Estranged

Use Your Illusion II, 1991

It's no coincidence that the best songs on both *Use Your Illusion* albums are their longest. Axl Rose was always way more complex than your average Sunset Strip hair farmer, and he pours all that complexity into *Estranged*, a rushing torrent of emotion that's not just the best *Illusion* track but also a high-water mark of GN'R's entire post-*Appetite* career.

This is Axl's song all the way, addressing his turbulent, violent marriage to Erin Everley. "I wrote the song basically about who I am and how I feel, the break up of my marriage with Erin and how I didn't want it to die," the singer said. "But also apply it to a lot of other situations or friendships where you knew it had to end."

At nine minutes and 23 seconds it's half a minute longer than *November Rain*. But where the latter song stuffs in as much drama as it can until it's close to exploding, *Estranged* ebbs and flows, shifting from stark piano parts to incandescent guitar eruptions that gives it a perpetual forward motion. And it features Axl's finest vocal performance: when he sings plaintively: *'I jumped into the river too many times to make it home/I'm out here on my own, drifting all alone,'* you're there with him all the way.

Estranged is more than just a snapshot of Guns N' Roses at that point: it offered a taste of what they could have become. That wasn't to be, of course – it would be another 17 years before a new GN'R album materialised, by which time everyone but Axl was gone. **DE**

2 Sweet Child O' Mine

Appetite For Destruction, 1987

The breakthrough song that turned Guns N' Roses into the most successful band of their generation; a bad-boys-with-broken-hearts ballad built on an immortal Slash riff and Axl's coiled-cobra charisma.

Axl said *Sweet Child*… was "the first positive love song I'd ever written", although Slash initially dismissed it as "a joke". The *'Where do we go now?'* coda was reportedly suggested by Spencer Proffer, producer of the band's pre-*Appetite* demo.

Ultimately, its ungainly birth didn't matter. *Sweet Child O' Mine* is the song that took GN'R to the masses.

Megan Lovell (Larkin Poe): "I have such distinct memories of being four or five years old and rolling around our family's mini-van to *Sweet Child O' Mine*. It was always on the radio all the time. That riff is so iconic – it sticks in your memory. It's a massive ear worm."

Rebecca Lovell (Larkin Poe): "One of the great things about that song is that it has so many segments. You have the main riff, which is a ballsy move in a ballad to begin with, then you have these vocal sections which are so pop and relatable, then it goes into this kind of Santana section, with these South American-style vibes."

Megan: "Axl Rose is definitely #goals in a lot of ways in terms of being a frontman. I love the way he would just fling himself into his performances. You knew you were signing up to get a very edgy experience when you went to see them live."

Rebecca: "My husband's band [Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown] have supported Guns N' Roses a lot over the last five years, and I've got to meet Axl and Slash a couple of times. They're really lovely guys. I was really surprised at how chill Axl Rose is in real life." **DE**

GETTY X3; LARKIN POE; JASON STOLTZFUS/PRESS

1 Welcome To The Jungle

Appetite For Destruction, 1987

One of the greatest album openers ever, *Welcome To The Jungle* compresses Guns N' Roses' entire essence into one ferocious four-minute mission statement. Danger, sex, violence, unhinged guitar riffs and siren-screaming vocals, all amid a clash of metal and pop. And that's just the first verse.

As Slash said in an interview with *Guitar Center*: "This represents to me probably the first real Guns N' Roses song, with Izzy, Axl, Duff, Steven and myself. The first real song we wrote together as a band. That was the product of the five of us taking an idea and making it our own. You can almost hear everybody's input."

The initial idea was Slash's. He'd been playing the stuttering intro riff around the house for weeks, and even when he did it on acoustic guitar for Axl one night, the all-hell-breaks-loose energy of it was contagious. They both sensed it could be something special. The riff got fleshed out into a song in a single three-hour session soon after at Nicky Beats Love Palace Studio in Silver Lake in Los Angeles.

"There was no analyzing this stuff," Slash said. "Writing a song was something that happened spontaneously. But in that whole discovering-ourselves period from eighty-five through eighty-six, when we were living very haphazardly and getting together and jamming, there was something going on that not a lot of people had. And this song just had that natural feel that was very cool."

The band navigated the deceptively complex arrangement, snaking through verse and chorus, while the middle breakdown section – which Slash said had a "bluesy, soulful feel" – was borrowed from *The Fake*, a song that Duff McKagan had written in 1978, when he was a member of Seattle punk band The Vains.

Inspired by the explosive track he was hearing, Axl dived into his a notebook and wrote some vivid memories of a cross-country hitchhiking trip he'd taken a few years before.

"On part of that trip I ended up kind of stranded in the jungle, the Bronx in New York," he told MTV. "This old black man came up to me and my friend, who were backpacking, and we had like no money, just enough for a couple of Cokes. We're sitting up on this bridge, and this guy says: 'Do you know where you are? You're gonna die. You're in the jungle, baby!'"

Axl finished the lyrics a week later, while visiting a friend in Seattle, drawing from another memory of when he first arrived in Hollywood in the early 80s, a starry-eyed Indiana kid.

"For young, impressionable musicians who aspired to rock stardom, Hollywood could be as intoxicating as it was for a hot eighteen-year old actress wannabe just off the bus from the Midwest," Slash said. "And it was a very telling lyric. Just the stark honesty of it. If you lived in Los Angeles, and in the trenches, so to speak, you could relate to it. And knowing Axl, I could relate to exactly where it was coming from."

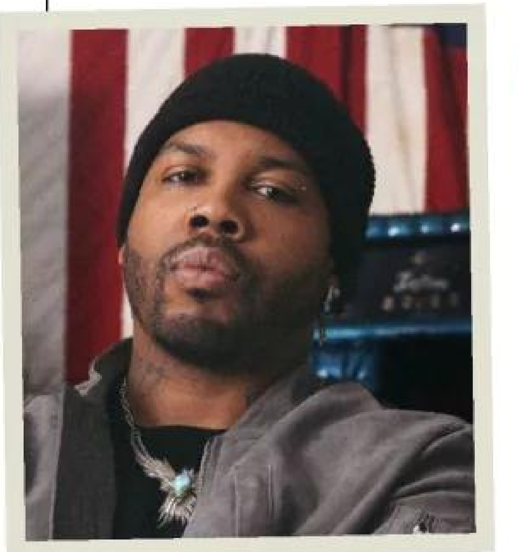
The final version of the song, recorded at Rumbo Recorders studios in LA and produced by Mike Clink, maintains the recklessness and electricity of a freshly minted track, with the band locked into a tight, dirty groove, breathing as one five-headed monster.

"*Welcome To The Jungle* is this high-velocity, high-impact, aggressive delivery," said Slash. "But there were a lot of emotional subtleties in the song that the band really grasped. If Axl went here, the band went with him. I really love that about the band and the music and how it all came together. There was something magical in all of that."

The second single from *Appetite*, it reached No.24 in the UK and No.7 in the US. At the time of its release, MTV were afraid to play the video, fearing its raucous visuals might get them dropped from their parent cable system. Finally, to appease the band's label head David Geffen, the station aired it during the small hours. Their switchboard overloaded, and they soon added it in heavy rotation.

The track has had a long pop-culture afterlife, appearing in many movies, including *The Dead Pool* (the band make a cameo in the Clint Eastwood film), *The Interview* and *Thor: Love And Thunder*, the *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* videogame, *The Simpsons*, a Taco Bell commercial and as the unofficial anthem for the NFL's Cincinnati Bengals. It remains GN'R's signature song, a kind of rock identity card that tells us everything about the band.

"We never conformed to anybody else's expectations or standards or commercial demands or whatever," Slash said. "No fucking gimmicks. This was rock'n'roll from the street – boom!" **BDM**



Ayron Jones: "*Welcome To The Jungle*, that's my favourite easily. It's just *hard*. It's just one of their hardest tracks ever, you know? Everything about it. It's equal parts hard classic rock with elements of, like, pop. You know what I'm trying to say? There's a little sprinkle of pop on there. Not in the sense of like modern pop, but like [sings] 'nanananananana-knees!' That's really poppy shit, you know? That's why I like that song so much. I love that song. Have I played it? No! I'm not touching Guns N' Roses. All that shit's hard, man! One of these days I would love to jam with Duff and Guns, though. If I ever get the opportunity to, on one of their tracks, that'd be cool.

"Me and Duff are friends. I hung out with him and Slash backstage when we did Hellfest together. The next morning we hung out in his hotel room, we just chatted. And that's another one of those cats I know I can call if I'm going through a hard time, and trying to figure out how to handle all this. You know, that guy's *really* been through it."

NEIL ZLOZOWER/ATLASICONS.COM

Guns N' Roses' appetite for success was satiated after just one album – one of rock's greatest debut albums.

THE CLASSIC ROCK INTERVIEW

IAN HUNTER

He's older than rock'n'roll itself, and back with an all-star cast on his new album on Sun Records. Here he talks to *CR* about working with Jeff Beck and Taylor Hawkins, punk rock, Alex Harvey, David Bowie, and sex and drugs in the 70s. This is what he's here for.

Interview: **Scott Rowley**

"The whole thing's been a fluke," says Ian Hunter, "a lovely fluke."

Back in 2019, even Ian Hunter thought that he was finished. He had released his last solo album, *Fingers Crossed*, in 2016. That same year saw the release of *Stranded In Reality*, a 30-CD boxset of his solo material that felt like a whopping great full stop to an amazing career. UK and US tours with Mott The Hoople in 2019 seemed to take things full circle.

To mark his 80th birthday, he did five nights at The Winery in New York City, playing through his back catalogue.

"I thought that was it," he admits. But Ian Hunter underestimated himself. Def Leppard manager Mike Kobayashi came to The Winery shows and offered to manage him. So there he was: 80 years old with a new manager – a guy who manages one of the biggest rock bands in the world.

Then in 2020, Covid hit, he says: "And me and a million others went downstairs into the basement and started writing songs. Because there was nothing else to do."

Three years later, Hunter has a new record deal – with Sun Records, no less, the label that inspired him to get involved in rock'n'roll in the first place – and we have *Defiance Part 1*, ten new songs featuring a *Who's Who* of rock, including some of the last recordings from Jeff Beck and Taylor Hawkins, as well as input from Slash, Billy Gibbons, Ringo Starr, Joe Elliott, Metallica's Robert Trujillo, Heartbreaker Mike Campbell, Todd Rungren, Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, Dean and Robert DeLeo of Stone Temple Pilots, Aerosmith's Brad Whitford, movie star musos Johnny Depp and Billy Bob Thornton and more.

"It was like: I shouldn't be doing this at my age, so that's another reason to do it."

It's a thrilling record that reminds you of why you like rock'n'roll in the first place. Smart, ballsy, touching, defiant.

"It's an intelligent racket," shrugs Hunter. "We sent the right tracks to the right people."

So here he is at 83 with his foot on the monitor delivering one of the hardest rock albums he's done in years, with guys from Guns N' Roses and Metallica. "Why not? That's why the album is called *Defiance*. 'What's he doing making a rock'n'roll album?' But it came naturally. There was no plan. I just kept writing and that's what came out.

"I just wake up in the morning and there's an idea. I don't write for business. If it comes, it comes. And I just got on a *tear*."

ROSS HALFIN/PRESS

Mott The Hoople in 1971 (l-r): Mick Ralphs, Verden Allen, Ian Hunter, Pete Overend Watts, Dale Griffin.

"[My dad and I] never got on. He was a cop and I was looking for excitement. So, y'know, I would do exciting things, and that didn't go down that well."

So Covid was an unexpected inspiration?
Well, I'm lively. And if there's nothing else to do, you might as well. Plus, it was like: I shouldn't be doing this at my age, so that's another reason to do it. When we came off the road with the Rant Band, it'd been 10 years of album after tour and it felt like time for change. I wasn't quite sure what that change would be but, you know, you just sit down and write. And then I had Mike, and there's another guy, [photographer] Ross Halfin – do you know Ross Halfin?

I do know Ross. Very well.
Ross has been a mate of mine for a long time. I'm one of the few people he hasn't fallen out with.

Oh, give it time, Ian.
I'll tell you why I like him: because he tells you what to do to take a good picture. I'm no good at that. He's like: "Chin up, chin down, move this way, move that way". It's great to do that because then you don't have to think about it. But between him and Mike Kobayashi, they were saying, "How about somebody else doing your songs?" And I sent them a couple and then it was like, "Well, Slash likes this one. Billy Gibbons will do that one." And that's how it started. I kept writing and they kept getting people involved. And Andy York, who was co-producer with me, we suggested people too. I suggested Ringo, because [first single] *Bed Of Roses* is his groove. It's a head-nodder. He said, "Well, if I like it, I'll do it, if I don't, I won't." Fortunately he liked it. It was all off-hand. The whole thing's been a fluke – a lovely fluke.

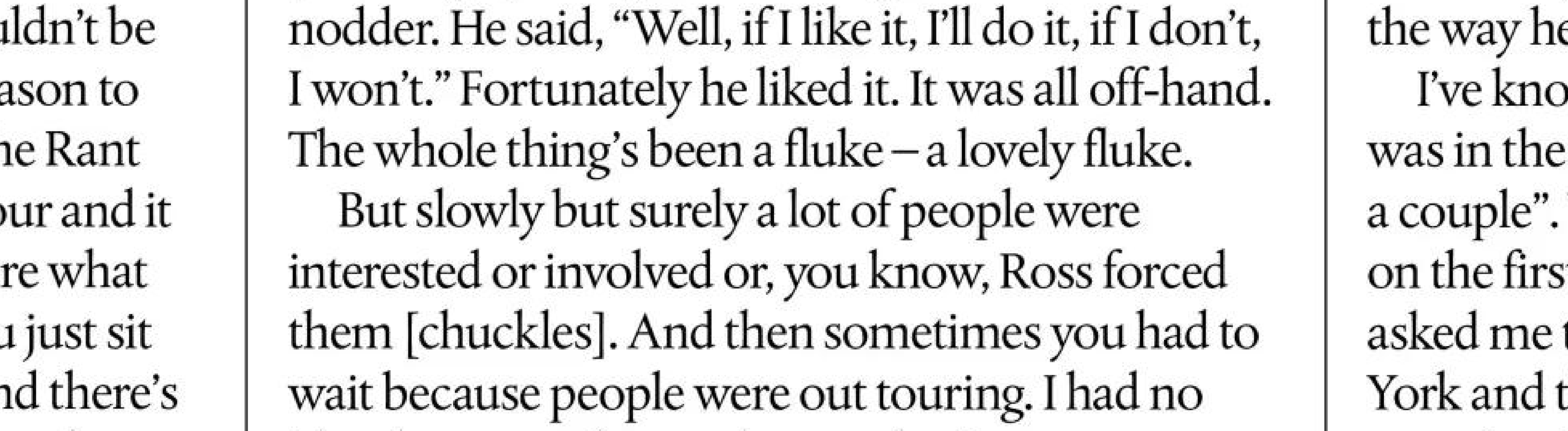
But slowly but surely a lot of people were interested or involved or, you know, Ross forced them [chuckles]. And then sometimes you had to wait because people were out touring. I had no idea these people even knew who I was.

Ross is really good at bringing people together like that. Back in 2016, we held the Classic Rock Awards in Tokyo and Ross put the house band together – Joe Perry, Johnny Depp, Dean and Rob DeLeo and so on.
I met him at the Classic Rock Awards. I didn't know the guy, but I liked the way he treated you, the way he told you what to do.

I've known Johnny Depp for a while and he was in the studio with Jeff and he said, "We'll do a couple". We sent them a couple of songs. One's on the first album, one's on the second. Johnny asked me to do a Vampires gig, so I came to New York and that's when I met Robert DeLeo. And he was a lovely bloke. So I rang him and we went back and forth. His brother Dean was interested and Dean rang and said, "Our drummer would like to do it as well." So things developed that way.

Did you know Jeff Beck before this?
I've been out with Jeff one night because, again, Ross said, "Why don't you come down for dinner?" And it turned out to be with Jeff and Johnny Depp. And we had a great night out, went for an Indian.

So all those years you were a part of the sixties and seventies rock scene, you never met Jeff Beck?
I met him once in New York. But I didn't know the guy. The thing with Jeff is: it's got to be absolutely right. So even when he's done it, he's got to sign off on it. We were worried for a while because he didn't sign off. And that's another thing. It's not only getting these people to do it – that's



Hollywood Vampires in Brooklyn in 2016: (l-r) Joe Perry, Robert DeLeo, Ian Hunter, Johnny Depp, Alice Cooper and Tommy Henriksen.

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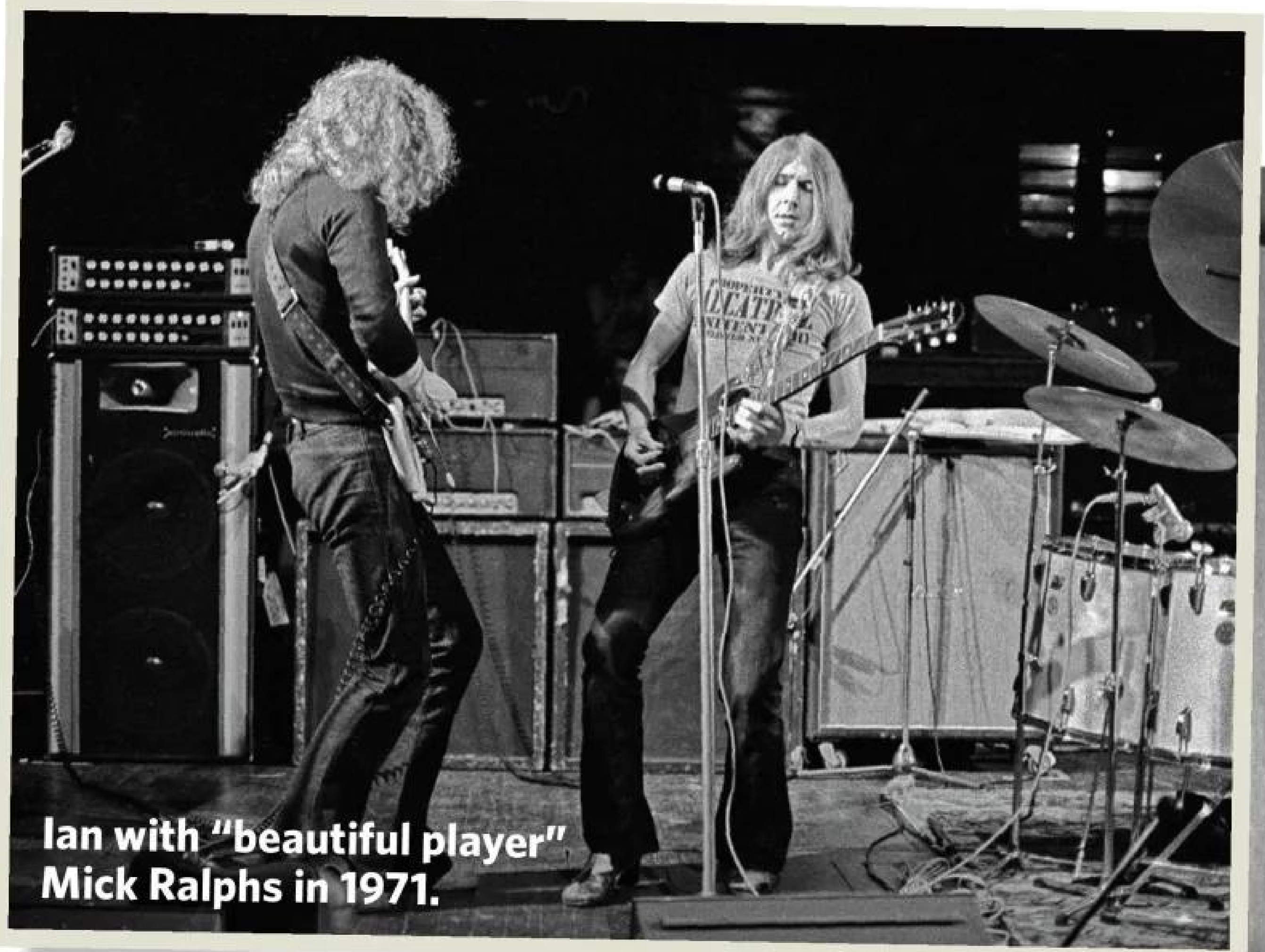


Ian with "beautiful player" Mick Ralphs in 1971.

the easy bit – it's the managers and the lawyers, after the fact. But he finally signed off just before Christmas. And then he got ill over Christmas. That was scary.

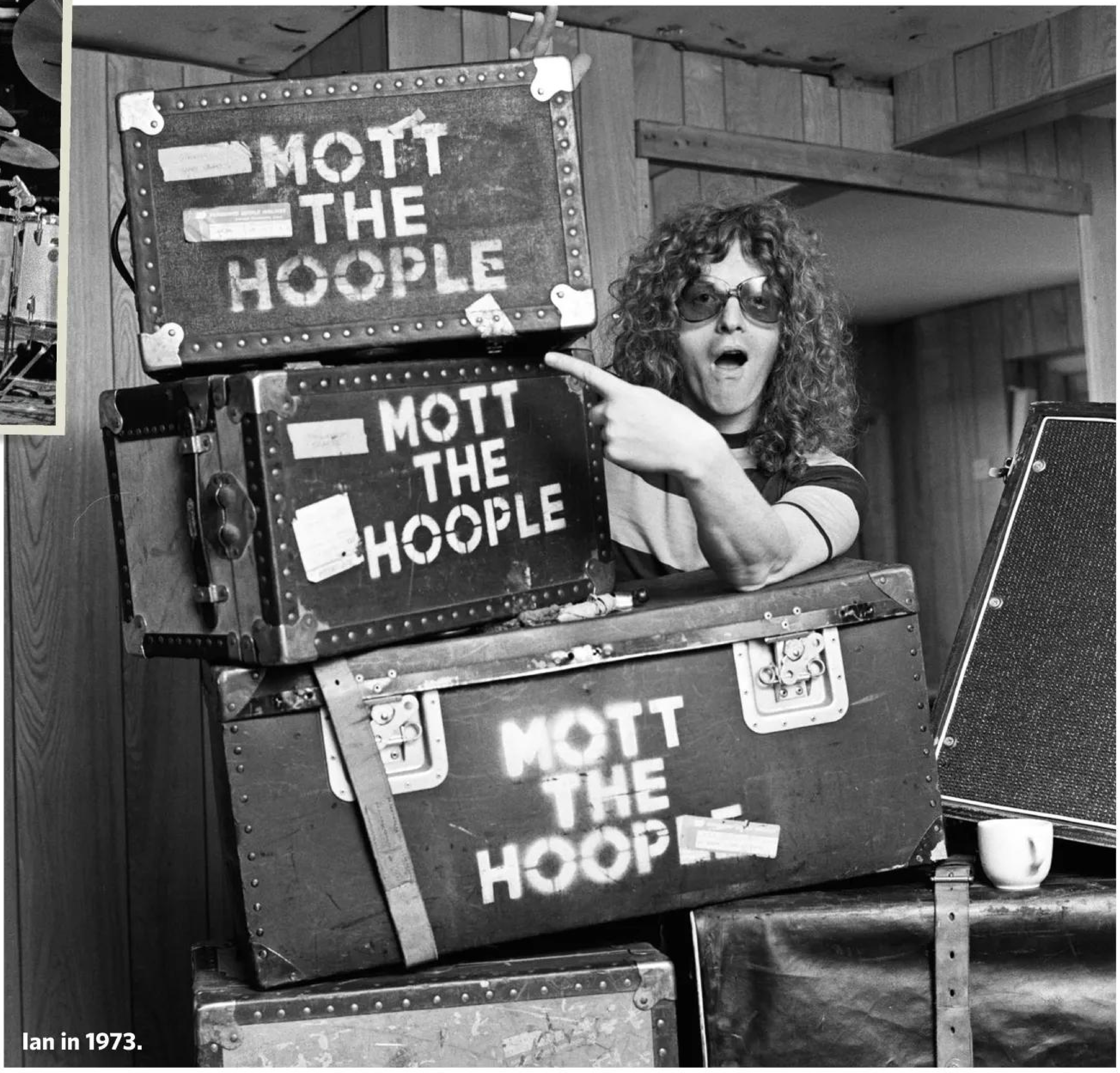
It was such a shock.
It was a shock. Same with Taylor. I mean, I didn't really know these people. I had met Taylor briefly in a LA in a hotel. He said, "You were in that band whaddyacallit?" And I went, "And you're in that band whaddyacallit". He said, "If the Foos ever come to New York, will you get up?" And I said, "Yeah." I never did. It was just one of those things, a guy you meet on the way. Then my manager Mike's saying "Oh, I had him on the phone for about an hour and a half – he knows everything." And that's when I started talking to Taylor.

He wanted to do it all. We sent him some tracks and he rang me up and said, "Look, I want to do all of this." But Covid started easing off and the Foos started going out again, so in the end he did seven tracks. Three on the first album and four on the second. He was gonna do them all. Amazing guy.

He seemed like a real music fan.
He was going on about *Standing In My Light* off *Schizophrenic* [*You're Never Alone With A Schizophrenic*, 1979, Hunter's fourth solo album]. That's why I say a bit like Joe Elliott, because Joe's encyclopedic. Taylor was the same. Such an upper to talk to. You could talk to him for hours. Full of life. He just came off as a guy who was just so full of enthusiasm, ready to go 24 hours a day. It was a real shock to me.

And what did he bring to the songs?
He's a great drummer. He's one of the best in the world. I sent him one song, a ballad called *Angel*. All he was supposed to do was drum on it. It came back with harmonies, he'd put a lead solo on the back end of it, he got Duff McKagan of Guns N' Roses to do the bass on it. And the harmonies he did! Andy and me were like: "Well, it's *done*." An incredible guy.

What about Robert Trujillo from Metallica?
Robert did a movie about Jaco Pastorius [famous as the legendary bassist for Joni Mitchell and Weather Report, some of Jaco's first recorded work was with Ian Hunter], and I did an interview with him. During the course of that he said, "If anything ever comes up, I'm happy to do something." So we sent him *Defiance*, which Slash was already on, and he used Jaco's original fretless bass, the same one that Jaco had used on *All American Alien Boy* [Hunter's second studio album from 1976]. So that was a neat little story. The combination of the two of them is absolutely



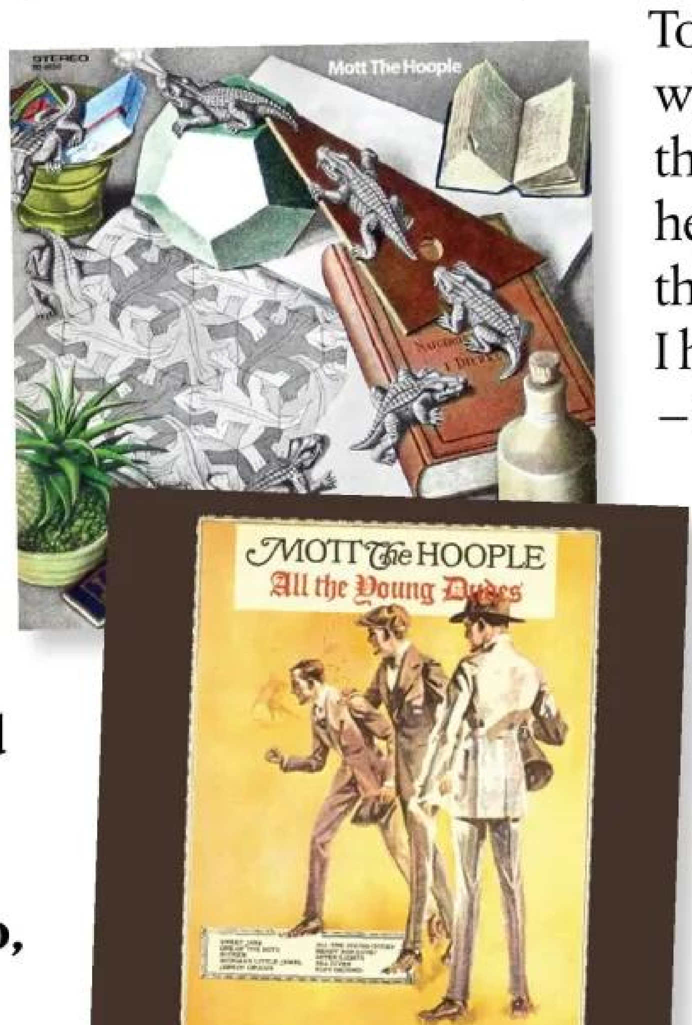
Ian in 1973.

"I just wake up in the morning and there's an idea. If it comes, it comes. And I just got on a *tear*."

great. There's a point at the end of the first solo that Slash does on *Defiance* where they both kind of finish up the solo together. It intermingles, even though they came from different studios. That happened a few times. A lot of flukes happened. We were dead lucky.

This is obviously a different way of working for you. You've spent years working with people in the studio, looking them in the eye.
And going on last. Here I was going on first. They weren't supposed to be the final vocals or anything but then Dean DeLeo's calling up saying, "Don't change the vocals!" Because they were playing to the vocals.

We did that on *Once Bitten Twice Shy* [Hunter's only solo UK top 20 hit, from 1975] – the drums went on last. It's not a bad way to do it, because then everybody understands the lyric. Normally when you go in, nobody knows what the lyric is, they just play the song. I remember [Mott bassist] Watts saying, "I never knew what you were on about!" He was just learning how to play it.



The *Rant* album [2001] seemed to usher in a new Ian Hunter, one that was more rootsy: acoustic rock'n'roll, with piano, a bed of acoustic guitars, that sort of instrumentation. But *Defiance* is very electric guitar rock, isn't it?
It's a rock'n'roll album. It's probably out of its time but that's what it is.

It feels like you hit a theme and maybe working with these guys gave you the confidence to rock a little bit harder. Because for all you're saying, there was no plan, it feels perfect: it opens with a song called *Defiance* and closes with *This Is What I'm Here For* – a defiant rock song.
You're right. As these people came in, I got more excited. And it came quicker because of that.

Tell me about *This Is What I'm Here For*. What are you here for?
To play music, y'know. I was 18, 19 when I heard Jerry Lee Lewis. Up until that time I didn't have a clue what I was here for. Didn't have a clue. You've got the factory and that's it. All of a sudden, I heard *Whole Lotta Shakin'*. "Ah, okay – *that's* what I'm here for." The only trouble was, I wasn't very good so I had to work at it.

I was a bass player. We did a lot of work in Germany and places like that, where you played every night, and slowly but surely, I got started. I played bass with Freddie "Fingers" Lee and he was like, "You write a decent song." I wasn't

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On stage with Mott The Hoople at The Royal Albert Hall in 1971.

Ian (far left) in 1968 as bassist for Freddie 'Fingers' Lee – inspecting Freddie's left foot with which he played the piano.

"I went in one day and he said, 'The Doors are looking for a singer and they mentioned you, would you like to do it?'"

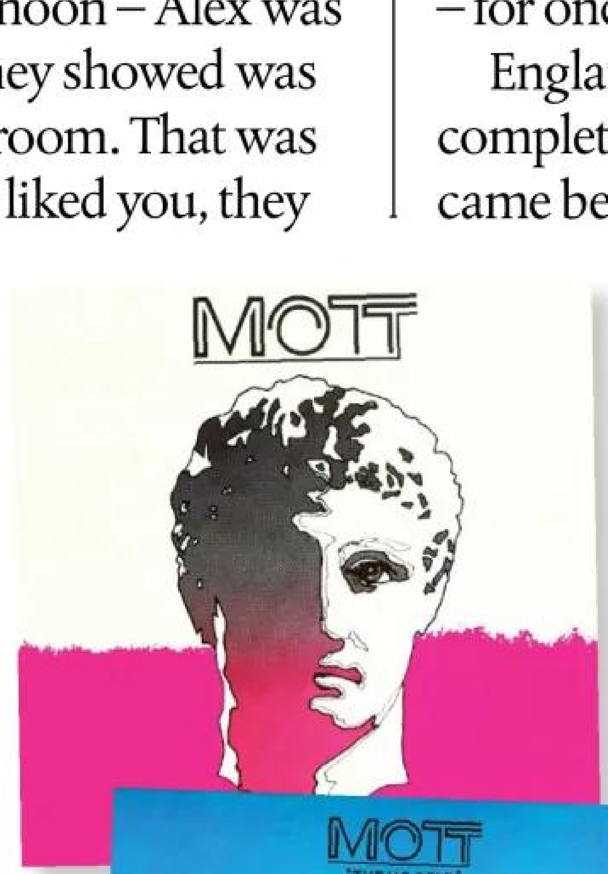
thinking about singing, I was just thinking about trying to get into the songwriting business. And I got into it – I was at [publishing company] Francis, Day & Hunter as a songwriter. Remember Dave Berry? He did one of mine [Berry recorded a Hunter song called *And I Have Learned To Dream* in 1967] and Nicol Williamson, the actor, he did one [*Season's Song*, 1970] That's before Mott. I was staff writer, just out of the factory, and then into Mott. And when I got into Mott, the two writers were Mick Ralphs and Pete Watts. Pete was lazier than I was, and he was also the good-looking one in the band, always off with models. So he was like: "You do it." None of us knew at the time that publishing was where the money was. Pete was like, "I'm busy, you do it." That's how Ralpher and me got to be the writers in Mott.

Richard Jobson of the Skids told me that he went to see Mott supported by Alex Harvey in either Edinburgh or Glasgow. He said that Alex Harvey left a hole in the stage – I guess he smashed a guitar or something – and you guys had to play around it.

[Laughing] I remember Alex! What's that place with the big high stage in Glasgow?

Glasgow Apollo [then called Green's Playhouse].

The Apollo, yeah. They used to give you a statue if you sold it out. Alex Harvey supported us there – his brother was there and his mother, I met them all in the afternoon – Alex was lovely. That place: the first thing they showed was the back door out of the dressing room. That was your escape route. Because if they liked you, they would go like, "Yer fucking brilliant!" and they'd smack you. And if they didn't like you, you were dead. The guy came in to give us the award for selling the place out, and he's got a bandage on, with blood coming through the bandage. The front doors were glass and they'd opened late that night, so the crowd had used him as *a battering ram* to get in. He was apologetic! I'm like, "You're *bleeding*!" But that was the norm.



The Sensational Alex Harvey Band and Mott The Hoople were two of the few older bands that the punk generation looked up to and accepted.

I didn't think it was gonna be like that. I thought it was gonna be like: "Old guys out!" We went to see [punk band] Chelsea one night and Mick [Ronson] got chased. But I was alright. Everywhere you went, everybody adored Mick, so it was strange that this would happen, y'know? He was like: "Fuck me! What the fuck was that?" I thought: *for once* – because all the girls loved Mick – for once I get to be adored, instead of you.

England in those days: everything changed completely and everybody hated everything that came before. I mean, I hated flower power and those blues guys that looked at their feet while they played. So I got it. It just goes through changes.

It feels like it hasn't changed much in the past few years.

Because everybody's glued to the computer. I don't know. I mean, it's none of my business. My wife talks to this *ball* that's in the kitchen. It does whatever she wants it to.

You don't talk to it?

No, I'm not that advanced. It's not an analogue thing. I'm too old to get into it. It's so fast. I'm an analogue chap. Fortunately, Andy

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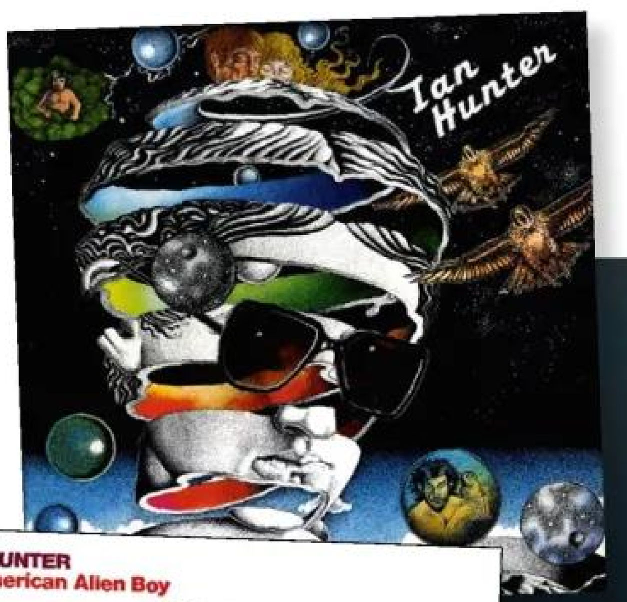

York is not. He's totally into that kind of thing, so that helps.

Both you and Alex Harvey were Scottish or had Scottish heritage. Do you think that some of your piss and vinegar came from that?

I've no idea. My mum was English, my dad was Scottish. My grandma had an organ and a piano-accordion. She was a bit of a girl, my grandma. She was married a few times, she was in the Rotary and all that kind of thing. She played various instruments. She was the only one in our family that was musically inclined. Everybody else was normal. My dad was a cop, my uncle was a bus driver. Perfectly normal, apart from my grandma.

There's a song on the album *No Hard Feelings* that sounds like it's a song about a father.

Yeah, that's a dead-on true story.

***'I'm gonna make a man out of you/If it's the last thing I ever do.'* Those are the actual words your dad would use?**

We never got on. He was a cop and I was looking for excitement. So, y'know, I would do exciting things, or my mates would, and that didn't go down that well. I don't know what he thought. I was a different animal. But he was a noble sort of guy. He did 25 years in the police force, he was in the war, he ended up in MI5. A very straight, noble sort of bloke. And he got lumbered with me. My brother was okay. He was more seriously-minded. But all I seemed to want was excitement. And I went looking for that wherever it was. And some of those places, you know, my father didn't agree with. It wasn't easy.

But at one point, I was in the shit up to my eyeballs, and he gave me 200 quid. That was a lot of money in them days. But that 200 quid gave me six months and during that time I met Bill Farley [engineer on the first Stones and Kinks albums, among many others] at Regent Sounds in London, and that was where the auditions for Mott were held. It was Bill who rang me up and said "Come down". So indirectly, my dad gave me that little timeframe when I needed money. He came through when it mattered. So that's what the song's about.

I saw you play in Milton Keynes a few years ago. Afterwards I came back to say hello and you had a load of old mates from Northampton there. It seemed like a close group of old pals.

Yeah. The thing was excitement. You couldn't get it in those days. Regular people were not exciting and I was on this quest for excitement. I was working for British Timken [a factory that produced roller bearings for the car industry] in Northampton at the time. That was boring. Everything was boring. And then I happened to meet a couple of naughty boys. I got introduced into the naughty boys' society, and I was on the fringe, but it was exciting. The humour was incredible – and it wasn't stupid humour, it was really clever. They could make a little escapade into an hour of hilarity. And all I had to do was play *Danny Boy* or something and I was in.

The one thing naughty boys love is rock'n'roll. The London mafia loved rock'n'roll. It was like: "Get your gear and fuck off" and then Freddie 'Fingers' Lee goes [mimics piano playing] a bit of Jerry Lee and all of a sudden we would be the life and soul of the party. Free drink, free everything. Villains always love rock'n'roll music.

What kind of villainy are we talking about?

Various types, y'know. I mean, some of these guys are still living. But they were exciting.

Ian with Joe Elliott at London's High Voltage Festival in 2010.

"When you're not that great a singer, you have to phrase a lot to get it across. It's the Dylan approach, a character approach."

At the High Voltage festival in 2010, the plug was pulled too early on your set with Joe Elliott and the Down N' Outz and it ended with a bit of a backstage brawl. Afterwards, you and Jimmy Page were laughing about it saying, "It's just like the sixties!"

Yeah. You've gotta remember, it was pretty boring in the sixties. I lived in Shropshire, which is agricultural. There's not much going on. Northampton was different. Northampton was full of life in them days.

Am I right in thinking that you had a bit of a fearsome reputation. People were quite intimidated by you, weren't they?

I don't know. David [Bowie] was. David thought I'd been in a motorcycle gang. And he wasn't far off, y'know. It wasn't a motorcycle gang, I dunno how to ride a motorbike. But David gravitated towards people he thought were a bit naughty.

Since his death, Bowie's talked about like he was some kind of saint. But you were never close – why not?

David was a different kettle of fish. You know how people are. You go to a party, you get on with some people, you don't get on with other people. Not because you don't *like* them or they don't like you, just because they're accountants or they're lawyers – they're in a different neck of the woods to you. David was great all the time I knew him, but he wasn't a guy I would have hung out with. Nothing personal. We got on fine in the studio. I went out with him a couple of times, but I don't make mates easy. I never did. And when I do ▷

With Jimmy Page at the Classic Rock Awards in 2013.

TOP: GETTY; BOTTOM: ROSS HALFIN

Performing *All The Young Dudes* with Bowie, Mick Ronson and Queen at Wembley's Freddie Mercury Tribute concert in 1992.

"David [Bowie] was great all the time I knew him, but he wasn't a guy I would have hung out with. Nothing personal. We got on fine in the studio. I don't make mates easy. I never did."

make a mate, it's for life. He was a friend like lots of people you meet along the way. David was extremely ambitious. He'd been around.

He was determined and he was ambitious. I wasn't – I just wanted to play rock'n'roll because it excited me. But David saw a whole lot more and was going for it, 24 hours a day. He just wasn't the type I would hang out with. But generous to a tee, lovely with the band. I mean, he gave us *Dudes*. I've got nothing but praise for David.

I think I look at it from the Mick Ronson angle and he seems really ruthless – the way he got rid of the Spiders – which seems like something he did throughout his career. He picked up people and then…
If you want to be that big, you're gonna have to be ruthless. I never wanted that. The fortnight I was in the first division, it got on my nerves. I didn't like it. First of all, you've got to plan years ahead, and all the rest of it. It stops becoming music, it stops becoming rock'n'roll and starts becoming business. David knew he wanted to be a monster. In a good way. When you want it that bad, you get it. If you've got the talent, which he did.

You' talked about the period after *Dudes* when you hit a purple patch and wrote *All The Way From Memphis* and all those classic songs. What had you learned – what changed?
It's the press, isn't it? It always comes down to the press [chuckles]. 'You're living on David Bowie,' y'know – 'You can't do anything yourselves'. David wanted to do another one but it was like, 'No way: because then we just become servants to you.' So then of course me and Mick [Ralphs] were panic-stricken, trying to write a hit for about nine months. And it was difficult because I'm limited as a singer. Mick would write these more soulful, blues kind of things, y'know, which Paul Rodgers [Bad Company] eventually sang. He was the right kind of guy to sing Mick's songs. I couldn't do them. That's the beginning of the end right there. My songs started coming through. We had to do that to get away from the David tag.

That was defiance then, too. The press said you were living in Bowie's shadow. And you were like, "Fuck you, we'll show you".
Still, to this day, it's *All The Young Dudes*. It wasn't even the biggest seller. The thing with *Dudes* was that it represented something. That's what separated it from all the other songs. It was special. We knew that the minute we heard it. And it's not a bad song to be tagged with either. There's some horrible songs that people have been tagged with. It's a great song.

Look at Jeff Beck and *Hi Ho Silver Lining*. He went to his death sort of hating that song.
Well, you know, at least it ain't *Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep*. People say: 'Why do you do that [*Dudes*] every night?' Well, because people want to hear it every night. It's a great song. God knows why he gave it to us. I've said that many times, but really, if I'd've had that song I wouldn't have given it to anybody. I think we caught him just right, because he had recorded it and wasn't happy with it. He'd done it in C, and we did it in D. Our's was a little higher, you know, and then Phally [Verdan Allen]'s organ was great. I think [Bowie] learned a bit from the way he'd done it with his band. That's why it came out as well as it did.

Maybe he wanted to make his name as a producer, at that time. Writing and producing a hit like that was no small thing.
Yeah. He was fabulous in the studio. He wanted to do the rest of the album, so we did. It didn't make any sense to me. It's like, "If you can write songs like this, get out there and do it. You're the one with a big ambition and all that." But somehow we had time for Iggy, he had time for Lou, you know. Pretty special.

[We talk for a bit about Mick Ralphs. Mick had a stroke in 2016. Hunter still speaks to him by phone.] The first time I met Mick Ralphs was when you brought him to the Classic Rock Awards. I got to know him a little later. He's a lovely guy.
Yeah, he's a West Country kinda guy. Great humour. Short little jokes. Kept himself to himself

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"Everybody thought we were on some sophisticated British drug that they weren't privy to. And we were on light ale."

but great to be with in a band. A beautiful player. Underplayed. Like Mike Campbell in a way – played for the song. 100 per cent. Same with Ronson. There's two kind of guitar players: the ones that play for themselves and the ones who play for the song. I like the guys that play for the song because I'm a songwriter. Back to Bowie: I mean, that was Mick's intro on *All the Young Dudes*. That's a great intro.

Let's talk about the seventies in rock music. There's lots of bad behaviour. Lots of drugs, lots of booze. Did you ever feel like you were going down a slippery slope?
No. Mott wasn't like that. The weird thing was, everyone thought they were – especially over here [in the US] – because of the name. "Mott The Hoople – what the fuck is that?" I remember San Francisco, everybody was clamouring and asking us what we were on, because they thought we were on some sophisticated British drug that they weren't privy to. And we were on light ale.

Later on, was different, I suppose. Y'know, you have a look but it was like: "Four hours up, four hours down, that's no good. That's not value for money." I really don't see it and I really don't recommend it to any kids coming up. Look at the opioid shit we're in the middle of. You've got to be in control, you can't let it control you. I wouldn't advise it. It doesn't help. You might get one song out of it, but that's it. And the cells never forget. A friend of mine says that: the cells never forget. It always comes back to haunt you.

In *Diary Of A Rock And Roll Star* there's a mention of groupies – the ladies of the hallway and so on. People are now looking back at the seventies and asking, "Were these women being exploited by bands?"
Aw, forget it. If you're in a band with Ronson, there's one outside the door, there's one outside the elevator, you come out to the ground floor there's another one there, in the breakfast room there's two waiting for him there. These were poor downtrodden people. Some of them *travelled* – I mean, girls were all over the place. Not really for *me*. I was never that God's-gift looking bloke. But I played with a few that were, you know. There were ladies all over the place. It was a different time, you can't equate it with now.

But you could see how people could take advantage of them – in more than just the obvious way.
Mick would never actually bother. The thing with Mick was that he liked to pull 'em. He liked to be the best-looking bloke in the room. All the girls wanted him. On the odd occasion that they wanted somebody else, he was horrified. "What are you talking about? It's *me* you're supposed to be looking at!" Because he was so used to it. Girls would travel, girls would be around, and some of them were really genuine: they were really into music and all the rest of it. I remember one girl travelling, and she had a two-year-old with her. And [Mott guitarist] Luther Grosvenor took her in a room and said, "You get on the bus and you go back to San Francisco where you come from because this kid should not be on the road". And Luther gave her the money. That's Ariel Bender for ya.

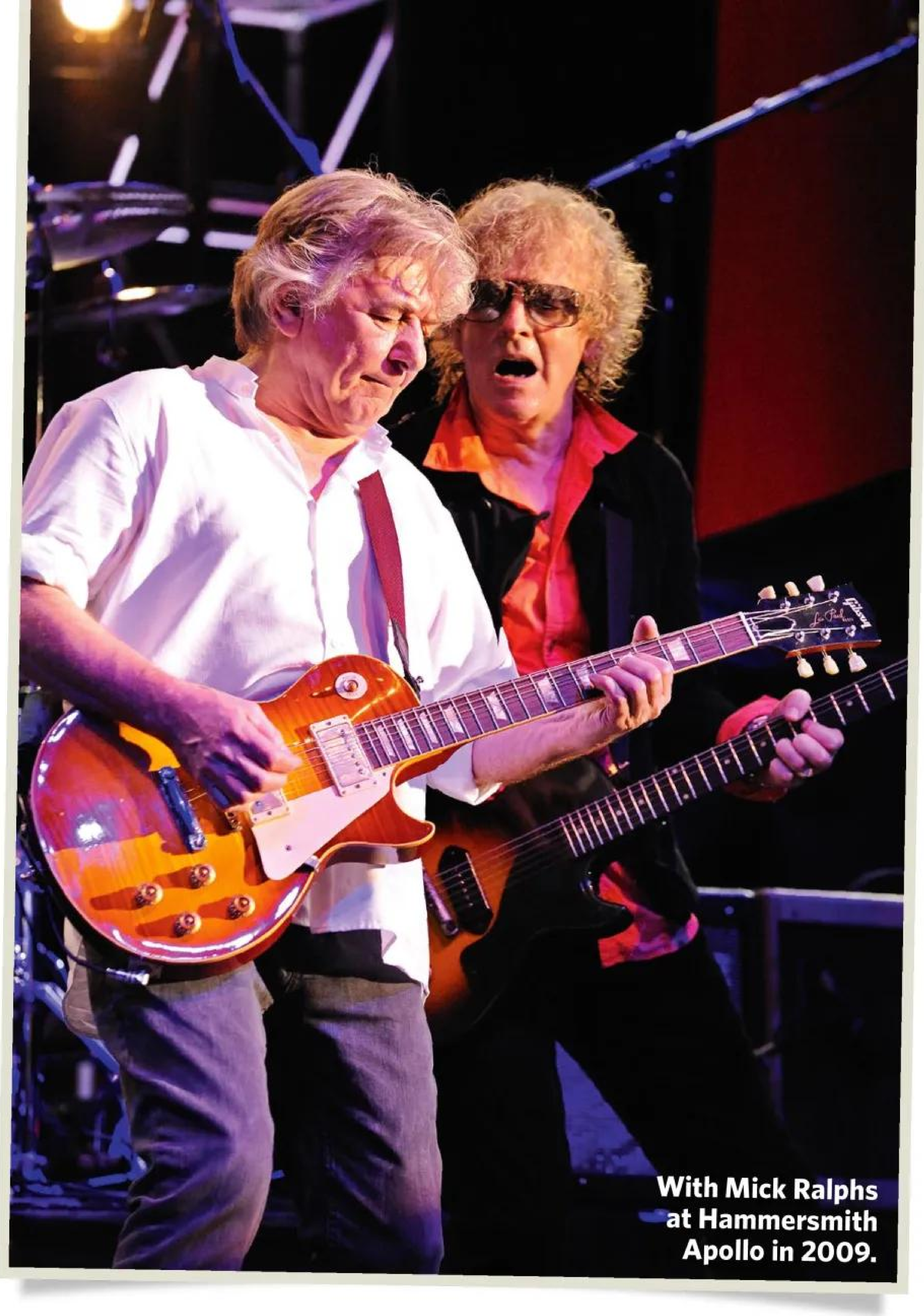
We're in the hotel in LA and they're sitting outside on the kerb all night. This would horrify girls nowadays, but it was how it was then. But what're you trying to get at here, c'mon?

I'm just trying to get a sense of it. You lived through some of rock's best years, I suppose, which in some ways are looked at now as problematic. People are looking back at, say, Steven Tyler and going: "Why did he have a teenage girlfriend? Was that appropriate?"
I don't know. I'm not really qualified to talk about what Steve did. I know a lot of guys had pasts, you know what I mean. But that's how *life* is. With everybody, not just people in rock'n'roll.

You're on Sun Records, the same label as Elvis and Jerry Lee. How did that happen?
When I auditioned for Mott, my audition was in Regents Sound in Denmark Street. Jimi Hendrix, Little Richard – all them people – they all rehearsed or played there at some point. That was the beginning. And the American equivalent of that has got to be Sun Records in Memphis. Howlin' Wolf, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee – I'm doing this for your readers – all these people started there. Have you been there?

Sun Studios? I have. I loved it.
I get the strangest vibe when I'm in there. It's like a room full of ghosts. Mike said to me, "Sun Records are going to re-form. How would that feel?" And I was like, "I've got to be on it! The yellow label!" I'm like a fucking four-year-old. So it worked out. If these are my last two records, it's almost like: Regents Sound. Sun Records. That's where it all started and this is where it all ends. It's kind of poetic in a way.

We'll see how it goes. I've got *Part 2* to finish, you know. But then already I'm writing for *Part 3*. Not because I want to, just because, y'know, you wake up in the morning and go, "That's not bad". We'll see what happens. Maybe these records will do OK, maybe they'll stiff, who knows?


With Mick Ralphs at Hammersmith Apollo in 2009.

How do you judge? How can you decide if something's a success anymore?
No, it's not at all like it was and I'm not particularly interested in how it is. So I just write what I write.

I think people are gonna love this record.
I hope they do, you know. But I don't think I'm gonna get a lot of new people because people are into new music, you know. That's the way they grew up. It's the way everybody grows up. It's what they're used to.

You've gotta assume that people who are interested in Taylor Hawkins, or who like Slash or Jeff Beck, they'll check this record out, and be interested in the connection.
It's very, very special record to me, put it like that. For all of them people to be nice enough to do it, and to do it as well as they've done it, is great in itself. It's a lovely feeling. So if it goes no further, I'm a very happy man. Because it's a special record.

But you earned it. Forget the classic albums: you've been making great records for the past 10-15 years.
I've enjoyed making them. The Rant Band has been great. We've been together 20 years now. It was time to do something different but I never realised it was gonna turn into *this*. It's been fabulous. It takes a lot to make an old chap like me excited. I'm like a teenager again, y'know, with the music. All these people got me excited again.

Tell me about the song *Guernica*.
I was in Madrid. The gallery was down the road [Museo Reina Sofía] and I stood looking at that thing for about 45 minutes. It's just symbolism, I guess. It just stayed on my mind. The weird

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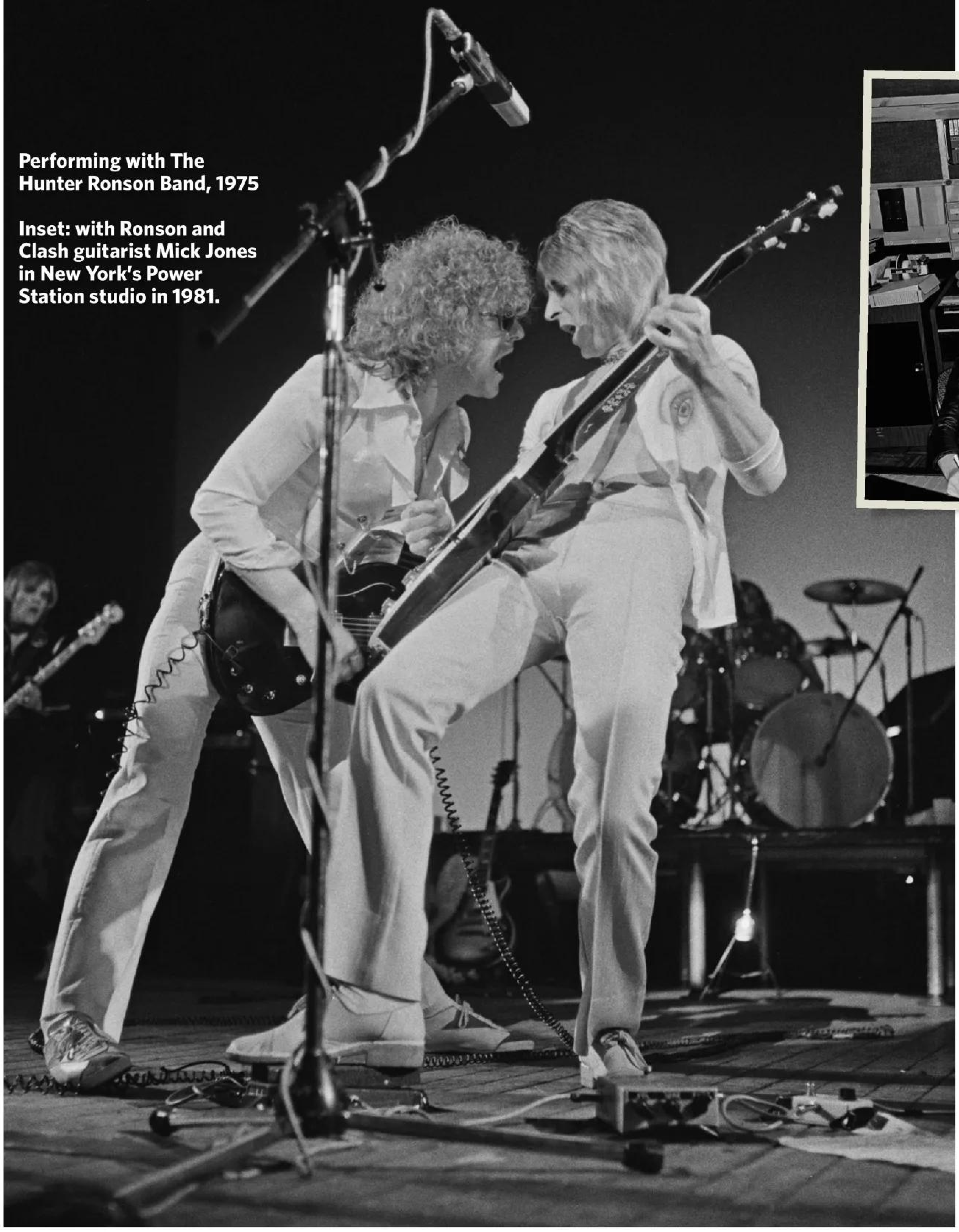


Performing with The Hunter Ronson Band, 1975

Inset: with Ronson and Clash guitarist Mick Jones in New York's Power Station studio in 1981.

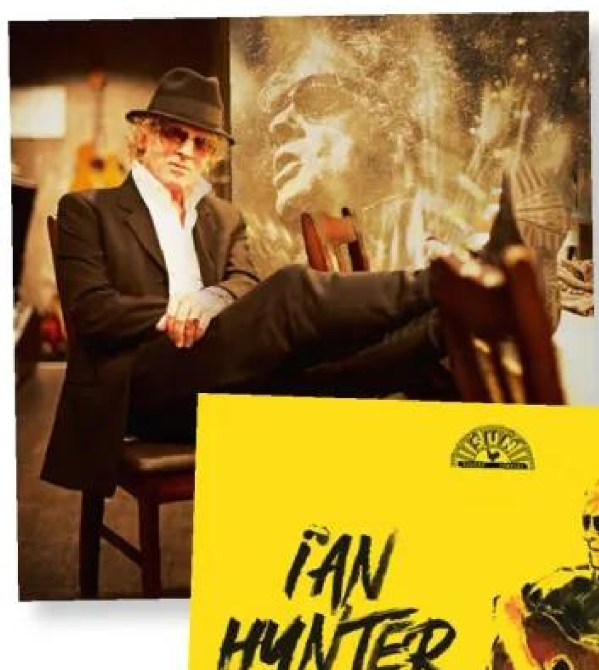
"The thing with *...Dudes* was that it represented something. It was special."

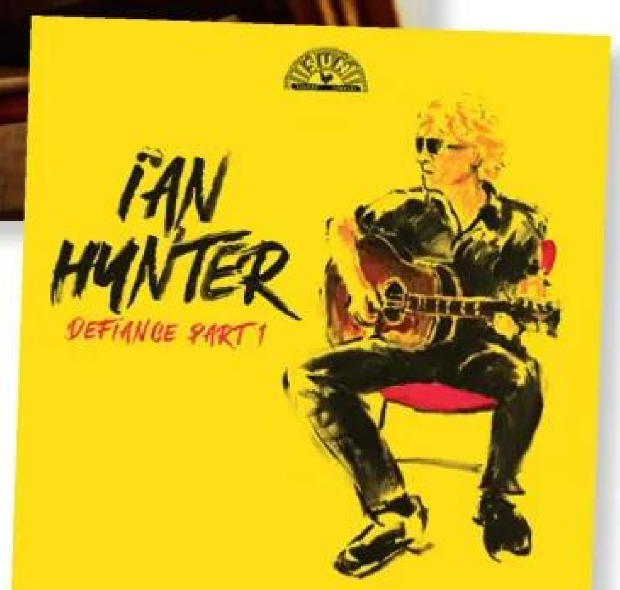
thing was, I had a place on the south coast for a while – a place called The Beach House in Worthing. It was apartments right on the seafront, and it turns out that the Guernica survivors, the children, were all put in The Beach House. I read this recently, after I'd written the song, but there's a connection: I lived in the same house as the survivors from Guernica.

You worked with Guy Stevens, Bernard Edwards, Roy Thomas Baker: what producer had the most influence, in terms of bringing ideas and vision to the music?

Guy. This is going back. Guy would just stand in front of you and scream at you. "You're great! You're better than the Stones!" And I guess it probably had an effect because we were all new to it.

I've never really had producers. The biggest help has been three engineers and that's Bill Price in England – he wound up at Wessex but he was at AIR when we did *Mott* and *The Hoople* – and then Bob Clearmountain in New York and the guy we're working with now, James Fraser. He's absolutely brilliant.





Bill Price – who produced or engineered albums by Mott, Wings, Roxy Music, Badfinger, The Clash, The Pretenders , even Guns N' Roses – is an unsung hero of British rock, isn't he?

Oh, people just don't know. I mean, he did the Pistols. I mean, he got beat up with the Pistols. There's a pub round the corner and they went in there one night and a fight broke out and Bill was one of the guys on the receiving end. Bill was fabulous. I mean, Bill was like James – he was ahead of ya. I mean, you'd be talking about it and by the time you finish the conversation, it was there in front of you. He would get Mick Jones [producer of *Short Back 'n' Sides,* 1981] eight tracks just to fuck with. All different echoes and reverbs, because Mick was into all different sounds. He would just give him his own little sort of mixing session on the side. But he'd come in with 100 cigarettes every day. A hundred Dunhill. And smoke 'em all.

So while Guy Stevens was in your face screaming and shouting and smashing furniture, Bill was the one actually doing the technical stuff.

Roxy Music were in AIR One and we were in AIR Two. Eno and Bryan Ferry came down one night. We were doing the *Mott* album, and we were trying to get hold of Mike Leander [the producer and arranger who had arranged the string parts for The Beatles' *She's Leaving Home* but was better known at the time as the man responsible for that big Gary Glitter sound] or Roy from Wizzard and we weren't having much luck. And they both said, "Well, why? You don't need a producer. It sounds great." And that was really because of Bill. So you know, we just carried on. And it worked. Til Ralpher left.

I read a thing where you said some songs are "prefabricated" – and then there's the good stuff. I took that to mean that sometimes you feel like you're writing clichés, or to a formula. But when it's good, you know you've hit on something special. How do you know the difference?

I'm kind of on 24 hours a day. You can be watching TV and somebody says something and it kind of relates to the lyric you might be working on. I'll think, "Yeah, I can twist that". I have to think vocally as well because I only sound good if I'm singing a certain way. I'm not that great a vocalist. When you're not that great a singer, you have to phrase a lot to get it across. It's the Dylan approach, a character approach. Like, "Yeah, I could get my chops around that". And if there's a bit of humour there, you know, or a double entendre, I like doing that. A lot of it's basically grammar. English grammar.

You mean like enjoying words and playing with language?

Yeah. Sometimes you're getting the point across but you're preaching. Or it's too serious. You try and grab something. It happens in *Bed Of Roses.* It happens in *Angel*, a couple of times, y'know: *'I want my angels to be perfect/Except on Saturdays'* [chuckles] The track comes back [from Taylor Hawkins] with all these dead serious harmonies and all the rest of it and I'm thinking, 'I hope nobody notices'. But it lightens it up, y'know?

Are there any of your songs that you thought would have done better than they have? For example, I think *You Nearly Did Me In* or *Irene Wilde* from *All American Alien Boy* are the kind of songs that could be played on radio every day of the week.

At the time Columbia Records had AM and FM

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Mott The Hoople's 40th anniversary reunion at Hammersmith Apollo in 2009.

acts. AM was the singles market and the FM was the album market and they felt that Mott was an FM band so they wouldn't push any singles because that would put us into the AM market. I kept saying, "But the Rolling Stones seem to do okay in both departments". But they wouldn't have it. They said the same to Ten Years After.

There are various reasons why things don't happen, you know. Presidents get fired. That happened to me on Polygram. You've got an album coming out and all of a sudden, the President gets fired and with him all his mates. So the new lot come in, you know, and nothing the last guy did was good. And I've been on little labels too. You get a song like *When The World Was Round* [*Shrunken Heads*, 2007]. It had a great video too. If it'd had a bigger label behind it, I thought that might have been a hit. And yeah, it's a drag, because you put a lot of effort into this stuff, for very little return.

That's the song that comes to mind. I think the words are great, but what can you do? It is what it is. I was out with the Rant Band, I was having a great time and with the little labels, you don't do much record-wise but you do a lot of merch while you're on the road. So it works out fine.

And it's nice for your audience. It might be small comfort, but the fact that you've never been a superstar has meant that your audience gets to see you in smaller venues rather than huge soulless arenas.

Yeah, I've always liked that. People think I'm lying to audiences when I say that. But anything between 500 and 2500 maybe, they're amazing places to play, because you can see people and they can see you. I'm not fond of the arena shit.

> **"The one thing naughty boys love is rock'n'roll. The London mafia loved rock'n'roll."**

I read recently that you were once asked to front The Doors. What's the story there?

There was a guy, I forget his name, but he worked for an agency – ICM or something like that, one of the New York agencies – and I went in one day and he said, "The Doors are looking for a singer and they mentioned you, would you like to do it?" I said, "No!" [Laughs] Because Jim Morrison looked like God and I looked like an average bloke.

There's a gig south of LA, about 60 miles down the road there, I can't remember the name of it now, but I found out quite recently that The Doors came to one of the shows I did there. Two of them came. So maybe it was true. This was around about '75/'76, somewhere around there. This agency guy, he always had a gun on his desk. Which was weird, y'know.

Can you reveal anything about *Defiance, Part 2*?

I think it's a bit heavier, a bit more serious. On the first one, you know, we were we were in the middle of Covid and Trump and all that, so I wanted it to be on the light side. The next one's a tad heavier. As things were getting to me [laughs]. Not that heavy, just a tad more political in places. It's supposed to be entertainment, not ramming shit down people's necks who are already fed up.

But there's a lot to be angry about right now, isn't there?

That's one of the reasons why this album is not angry. I didn't want that. But I couldn't help myself on the second one.

Defiant Pt. 1 is out now on Sun Records.

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BRINGING IT ON HOME

Released in 1973, **Led Zeppelin**'s fifth album was not without controversy. It also split fans, confused by its range of musical styles and wondering where its *Whole Lotta Love* or *Stairway* was. But *Houses Of The Holy* signposted the way forward for a band now operating at their peak.

Words: **Mick Wall**

In drab, recession-hit Britain, 1973 paradoxically was the year of glam rock. Of boys who would be girls who would be boys cavorting on *Top Of The Pops* in tin-foil costumes, 12-inch stack-heels and trowelled-on make-up.

All that glitter had come early for Led Zeppelin, however. Already the most glamourous rock group in the world, the astonishing planet-devouring success of their famously untitled fourth album, aka *Led Zep IV*, meant Zeppelin were also now the biggest.

They had already been Number One in Britain and America simultaneously long before Bowie had acquired his lightning flash or Bolan had begun sticking stars on his funky little boat race. And it was Zeppelin who would release the most fabulously outré album of the year, one that perfectly summed up the joyous anything-goes atmosphere of the 1973 music scene. An album reveled in hedonistic pleasures, which they'd titled *Houses Of The Holy*.

The fifth Led Zeppelin album, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this month, it was also their first to have a title other than the band name, and was the gladdest they ever sounded. The most beautifully poised. The most downright colourful and sparkly and infectious. As Jimmy Page recalled: "You can hear the fun we were having. You can also hear the dedication and commitment."

This was peak Led Zeppelin, a band now at their creative zenith. Only the Rolling Stones matched them for musical promiscuousness, as both toyed, variously, with funk, reggae, country, West Coast. Then on *Houses Of The Holy* Zep went even further, allowing jazz, synthesisers, folk, doo-wop and Asian raga influences to seep into their signature sound.

> **"We were buccaneer musicians, ready to try anything. *Houses Of The Holy* was the result."**
>
> **Robert Plant**

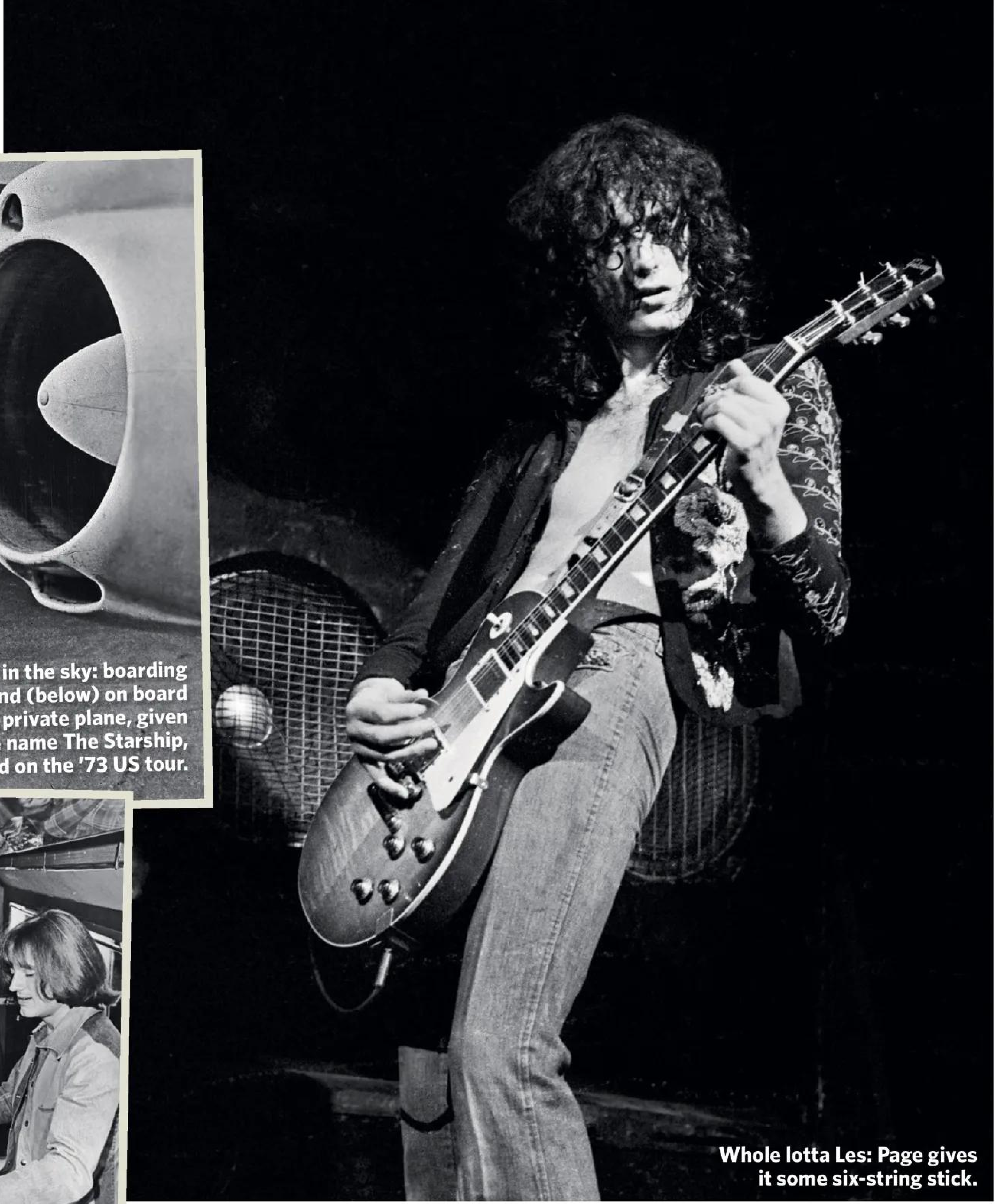
As Robert Plant told me: "By that time the whole thing had taken on an entirely different aspect. It was such a big deal by then, the feeling of freedom it gave out was tremendous. We were buccaneer musicians, ready to try anything. *Houses Of The Holy* was the result."

For Zeppelin, the newfound glitz and musical frivolity of 1973 had begun as far back as December 1971, when they entered Basing Street Studios in London. Straight from their 'UK winter tour', nobody had been sleeping and they sizzled as they jammed together.

Page was 27 and supreme master of all he

PHOTOS: EVENING STANDARD/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN NIXON MANIPULATION: SAM WILLIAMS @ MAGICTORCH

Spirits in the sky: boarding and (below) on board Zep's private plane, given the name The Starship, used on the '73 US tour.



Whole lotta Les: Page gives it some six-string stick.

surveyed, the light, the dark and everything between. Plant, at 23, was in golden-god mode and, as one onlooker observed, "dripping in pussy". John Paul Jones was 25, could play anything and was already established as Page's musical consiglieri. John Bonham was also 23, and in full beast mode. Off the road, a family man, they said. But Zeppelin were never off the road.

Young men, at the height of their powers, and several songs that gleefully spun off in different directions arrived all at once, including some buried treasure that wouldn't see the light of day for years. The mellow, Neil Young-influenced *Down By The Seaside* and a fully leaded *The Rover*, both of which surfaced in buffed-up form three years later on *Physical Graffiti*. A semi-acoustic, cider-jug version of *Poor Tom*, nailed together by Page, Plant and Bonham that showed up a decade later on *Coda*. Most impressive, and decidedly deluxe, a cinematic, glacia-paced new synth-orchestrated made-for-midnight extravaganza Jonesy had been piecing together titled *No Quarter*. "We had little riffs here and there," Page remembered, "certain constructions. And it was a question of really working on it and seeing how things came together."

By April 1972, Zeppelin had hired the Rolling Stones' mobile studio and begun recording at Mick Jagger's country pile, Stargroves, in Hampshire, and continued later at Olympic in London, then Electric Lady in New York. Between times they had fitted in their first tour of Australia and New Zealand, a four-week schedule that saw them headlining 25,000-capacity venues such as the Western Spring Stadium in Auckland and the Showground Stadium in Sydney.

The new album was originally scheduled for release in August 1972, at the end of another sold-out summer tour of the US. But, not for the first time, there were problems with both the artwork and the mix, and it was eventually put back until the beginning of 1973, by which time the band had completed their second Japanese tour and a long, 25-date trip around the UK, which began in December and continued to the end of January – the last time Zeppelin would ever tour their home country. They didn't know that then, of course. It was seen as a triumphant homecoming.

> **"You can hear the fun we were having. You can also hear the dedication and commitment."**
>
> **Jimmy Page**

Zep were now the biggest-selling band in the world, and manager Peter Grant was boasting to anyone within earshot how they would rake in "over thirty million dollars this year alone".

It was now in 1973 that the feeling of invincibility that Grant had helped foster within the band really began to take hold. This was the rock-fabulous age of colour TVs out of windows and riding motorbikes down hotel corridors that Zeppelin and fellow travellers like the Stones and The Who came to embody.

No 70s guitar god represented the extreme Byronic sensibility in person though quite like Jimmy Page. For those who knew him, it was still just possible to see the real guy behind the image. But as the next few years skittered and jolted by, the mask would become harder and harder for him to peel off.

While both Bonham and Plant invested in farmhouse estates in the country, Page flitted between his newly acquired 18th-century manor in Sussex, Plumpton Place, complete with moat and terraces off into lakes, and flying visits to Aleister Crowley's infamous former abode, Boleskine House in the Scottish Highlands, intent on furthering his 'studies' into the occult. It was as though, having conquered this world, Page and Zeppelin now looked for dominion over the next.

Finally released in March 1973, *Houses Of The Holy*, in common with its illustrious predecessor, came with no writing on the sleeve, but an inner bag with full lyric sheet for the first time plus attendant info, all in the same enigmatic typeface as used for the track-listing on *Zep IV*, the album's title stencilled at the top of each page – for side two, back to front, as if in a mirror. There was also a paper band wrapped around the outer sleeve – a last-minute concession to their label, Atlantic Records – with group name and album title on it,

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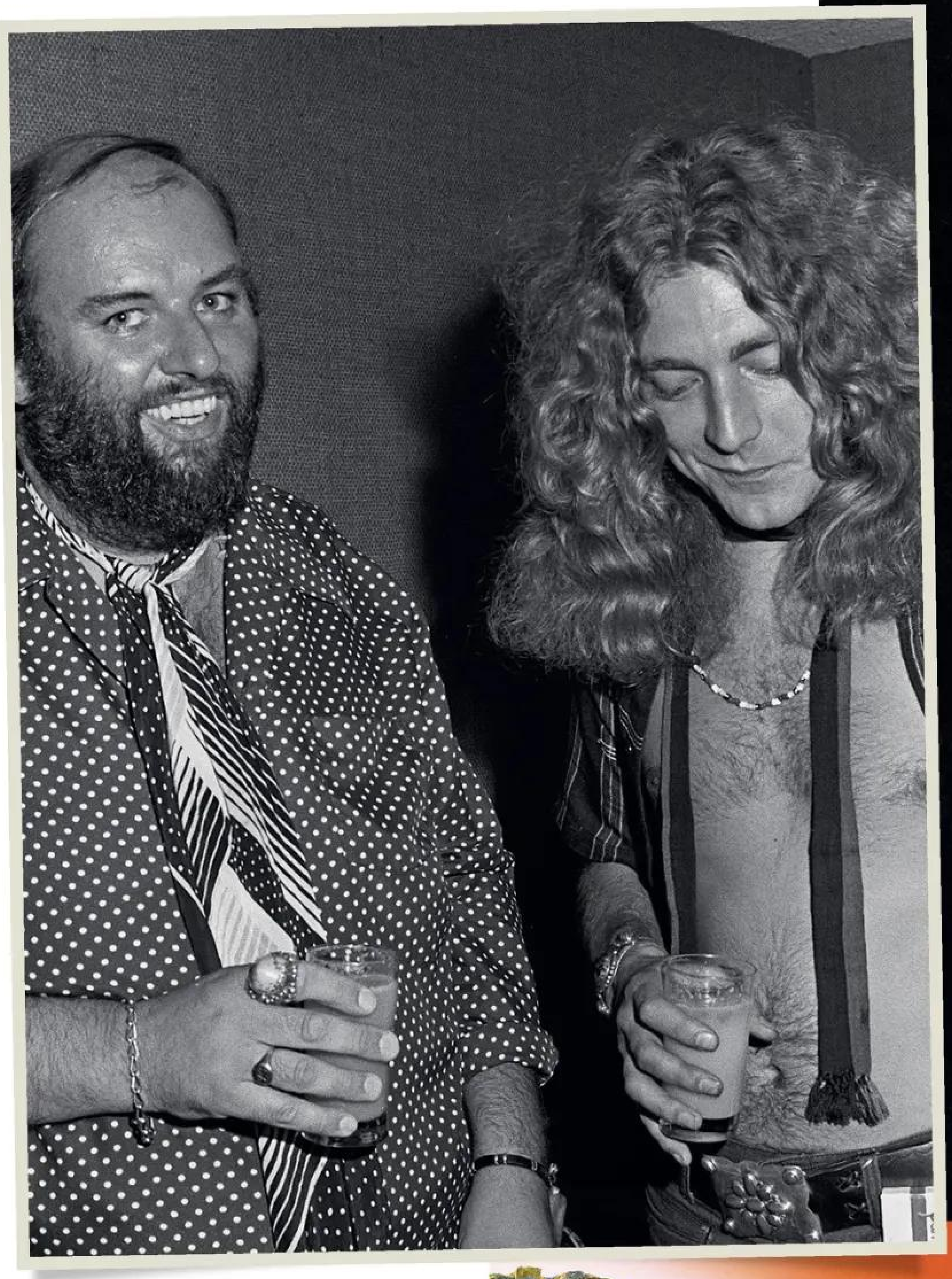
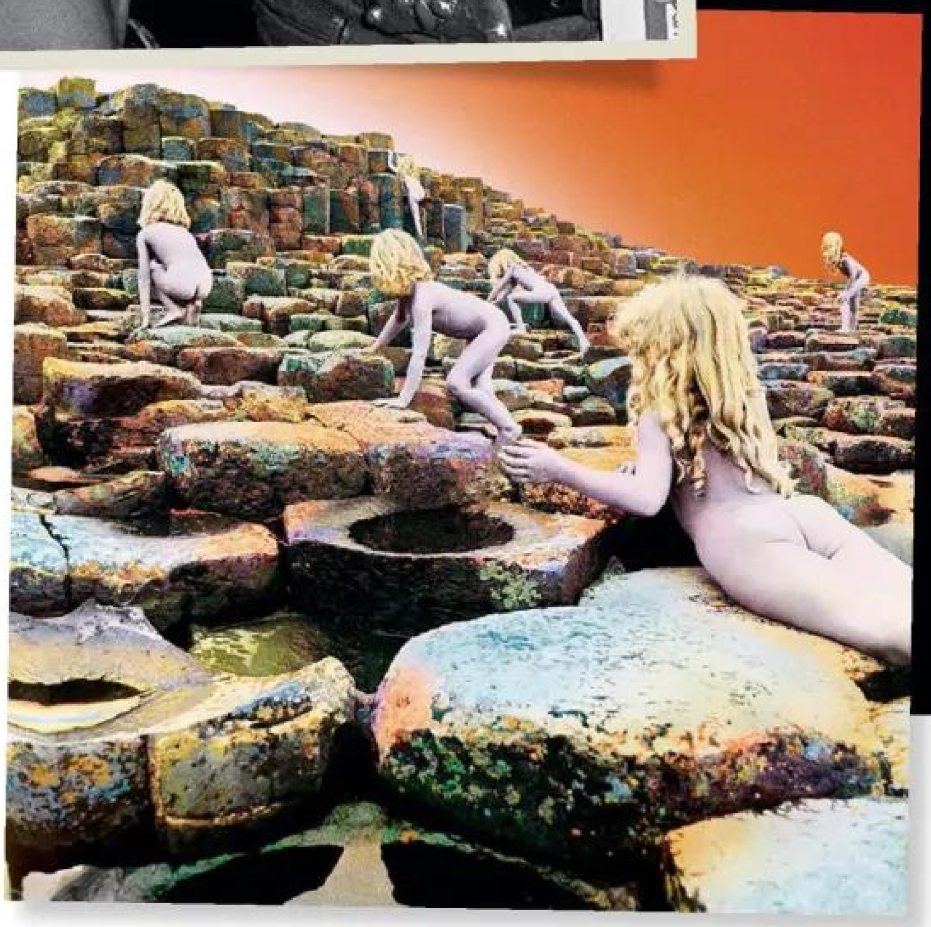


Plant in full-on rock god mode, and (left) with band manager Peter Grant.



to be taken off and binned after purchase.

The image that adorned the outer gatefold sleeve was their most arresting yet: a view from behind of 11 naked children (who turned out to be a single brother and sister, their images multiplied in the photographer's dark room) ascending a cratered hilltop slope. The inside appeared to depict a human sacrifice, one of the children being held aloft in the distance by an older, naked male figure as the sun's rays begin to crest over the hills. An echo, perhaps, of Crowley's symbolic sacrifice of the inner child. Few critics at the time picked up on the occult references, preferring to dwell, as one writer put it, on its "naughty overtones… naked little girls clambering up a mountain, a sexual representation of pre-sexual people".

"I wouldn't have looked at it that way at all," Page responded tetchily. "Children are houses of the holy; we're all houses of the holy. I don't see how that's naughty."

In fact, the *Houses Of The Holy* sleeve was conceived by Hipgnosis designer Aubrey Powell, after Page had angrily rejected the original idea put forward by Powell's partner, Storm Thorgerson: a picture of an electric-green tennis court with a tennis racquet on it.

"I said: 'What the hell does that have to do with anything?'" Page recalled. "And he said: 'Racket – don't you get it?' I said: 'Are you trying to imply that our music is a racket? Get out!'"

Powell, who hadn't heard the music, put forward two ideas: one involving a photo-shoot in Peru, the other a trip to the Giant's Causeway, the renowned rock formation on the north-east tip of Northern Ireland. Informed that both ideas would be extremely expensive, Powell recalled Grant exploding: "Money? We don't fucking care about money! Just fucking do it!"

Favouring the children-climbing-the-mountain idea, Powell arranged a trip to Ireland with the brother-and-sister child models, a camera crew and a make-up artist.

Intended as a full-colour shoot, Powell revised his plans when it rained the entire week, and shot in black and white. He had planned for the models to be painted gold and silver, but in the final hand-tinted images they appeared pale pink, almost white. "When I first saw it, I said: 'Oh, my God.' Then we looked at it and I said: 'Hang on a minute, this has an otherworldly quality.' So we left it as it was." The inside photo was taken at an ancient Celtic castle nearby, where the crew were "so cold, and so freaked out because it wasn't working, that the only thing I could keep everybody together with was a bottle of Mandrax [a sedative] and a lot of whisky".

'It was now that the feeling of invincibility that Peter Grant had helped foster within the band really began to take hold.'

The music on the album also had a certain colourfully 'hand-tinted' quality to it, the sound brighter and more effervescent than on any previous Zeppelin album.

"That was certainly the mood I encountered when I worked with them on it," says former Jimi Hendrix producer Eddie Kramer, who sat alongside Page in the mobile studio at Stargroves. "It was springtime in England and the atmosphere among the band was very jolly. Even the weather was really good. Jimmy had Jagger's bedroom at Stargroves, and everyone was happy."

The album opens with the ringing symphonic guitars of *The Song Remains The Same*, the first of four determinedly upbeat Page and Plant songs on which the album is built. The track's working title in the studio was *The Overture* and/or *The Campaign*. The overall feeling is immediately one of joyous abundance, excitement at life, the sheer thrill of it all. Plant's vocals were shrilly enhanced by Page speeding them up in the studio. The chiming guitars were shamelessly filched from the opening chords of The Yardbirds' 1967 track *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor*, originally credited to Page and Yardbirds drummer Jim McCarty. On *Houses Of The Holy* the guitars are layered to such extremes that they begin to resemble the sound of a sitar or tambura. With Plant's artificially accelerated vocals in such a high register, they too begin to resemble the excitement of Indian reed and vocal music.

"The whole album had a very upbeat quality to it," Kramer recalls. "There was a unity of spirit and a unity of direction of sound. A lot of that, of course, had to do with Pagey and the fact he had a very clear idea of what he wanted. This was one of the tracks Jimmy brought in rough mixes of ▷

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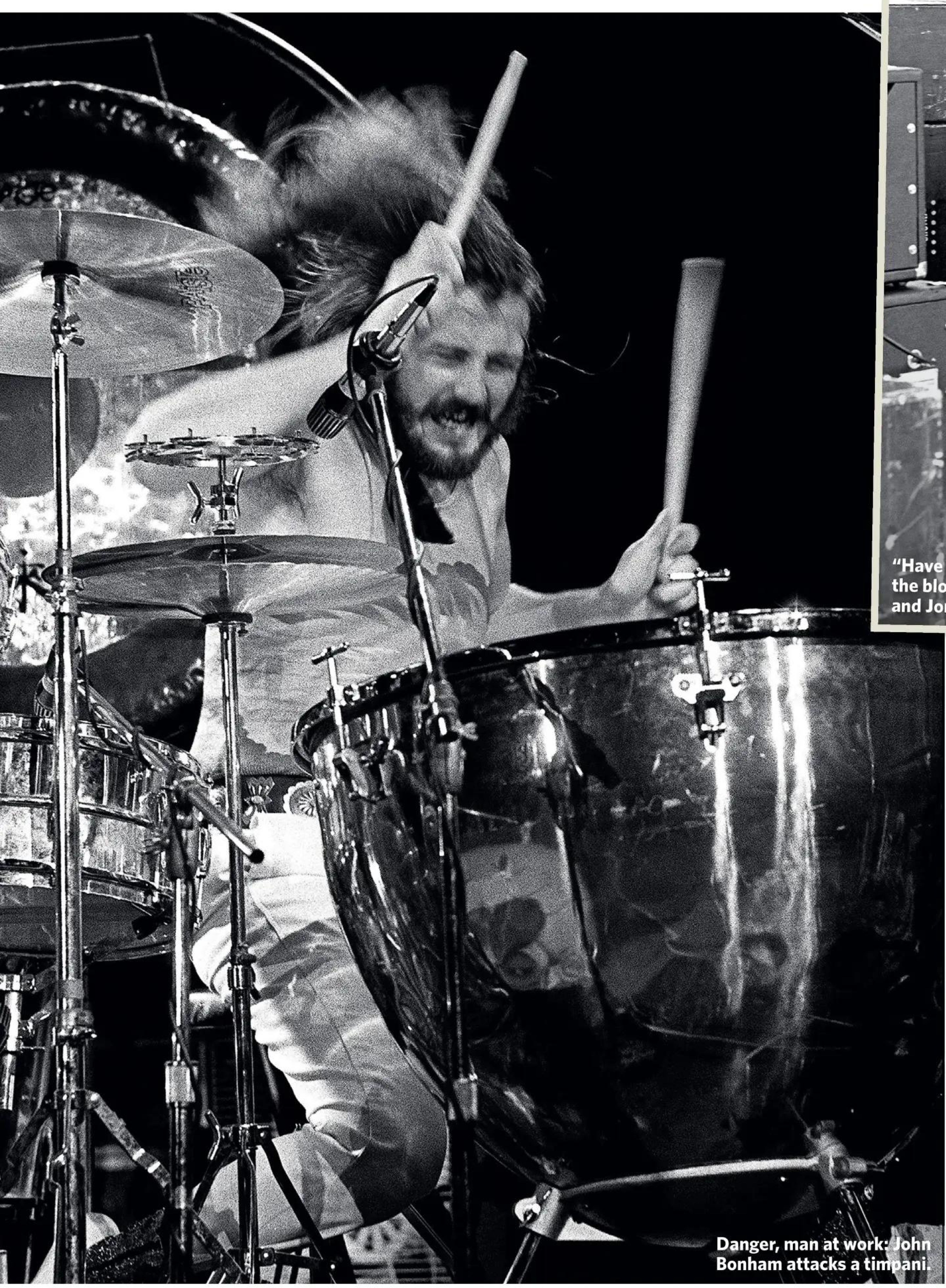
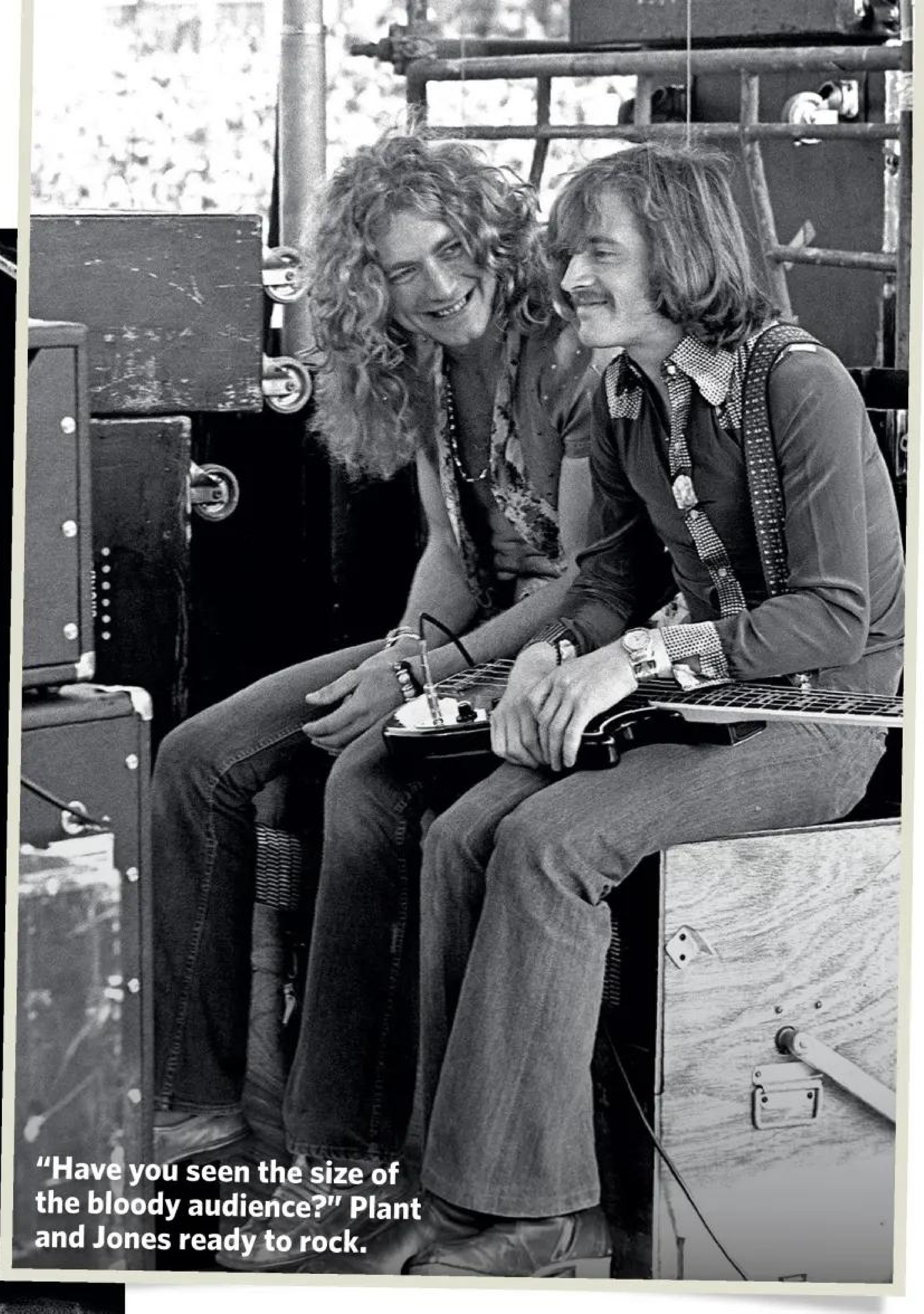


Danger, man at work: John Bonham attacks a timpani.



"Have you seen the size of the bloody audience?" Plant and Jones ready to rock.

"Children are houses of the holy; we're all houses of the holy. I don't see how that's naughty."

Jimmy Page on the *HOTH* album sleeve

on cassette. The cassette was his bible. He had his own studio by then and was always bringing his cassette machine in."

The Rain Song, which follows *The Song Remains The Same*, was originally conceived as an extension of *The Overture*, but became a track in its own right after Plant unexpectedly added verses to the latter, turning the former into a smouldering elegy to '*the springtime of my loving*'. It's an equally euphoric, if slowed down, sunburst of a song, Jones adding exotic texture with swelling orchestral sounds from his newly acquired Mellotron, a mechanical instrument that uses tape loops triggered by a keyboard. It was a favourite effect until then of progressive rock groups like Genesis and the Moody Blues.

Kramer: "I love this track, because of its typically esoteric Pagey guitar tuning, but also because of the role John Paul plays on it. This was the album where Jonesy finally stepped out of the shadows. He was a superb arranger, who could conduct an orchestra while playing bass with one hand. I once saw him do that! That Mellotron he plays is what lifts the track to another emotional level. And the piano, which he also plays, is like rain drops. Or maybe tear drops. I don't think they'd ever done a track so subtle before. That's the test of a great arranger, to do something so subtle yet which has such power. Quite beautiful."

Similarly fresh-sounding was *Over The Hills And Far Away*, a climax in a trilogy of crescendoing openers, its signature acoustic-electric dynamic traceable all the way back to *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You* and *Ramble On* from the first and second albums respectively.

Another feature of the album that Kramer identifies is how most of the tracks have their own boutique ending – Plant's orgasmic "Oh!" at the end of *The Song Remains The Same*; the echoing guitar at the climax of *The Rain Song*.

"The best, though, is the coda to *Over The Hills And Far Away*. I think it was something I suggested at the mixing stage. I used to do something similar with Hendrix sometimes – fade the track out, then bring it back, like an extra breath."

What really makes the track, though, "is that it really shows off the Zeppelin preoccupation with light and shade, acoustic and electric. Plus Bonham's dynamite drums!"

So too, *Dancing Days*, a snake-hipped, long hot summer of a song, inspired by a slouch-backed melody picked-up during a recent flying visit to Bombay, that finds the Page-Plant axis at its most delirious, all zinging guitars, bouncing drums, and Plant's voice cooing like the lovesick hippie he still believed himself to be.

"By the time they started playing the track with me, it just had the most amazing vibe," Kramer recalls. "Just a glorious groove! They all enjoyed playing it so much. The way Bonzo played it was what really made it, though. He just found a way to make the rhythm bounce and snap that could not be denied. I'll never forget playing it back to them from the mobile truck and how excited they all were. It was a lovely sunny day, and there was Jimmy and Robert and a couple of others all sort of linking arms and dancing on the lawn, sort of synchronised together. All dancing and laughing at the same time. I don't think even they could believe how good they sounded."

However, it was the other four *HOTH* tracks that provided most of the talking points,

JAMES FORTUNE/ATLASICONS.COM x2

Plant picks up another bird: Kezar Stadium, San Francisco, June 1973.

JAMES FORTUNE/ATLASICONS.COM

typifying the more ensemble feel of the album, beginning with the last track on side one, a band composition titled *The Crunge*, a full-funk parody that singularly fails to deliver any laughs, despite a desperate last-ditch attempt by Plant who can be heard lampooning James Brown, demanding, "Where's that confounded bridge?"

Kramer offers a different point of view, though: *The Crunge* was "one of those tracks that sounds like it just started as an impromptu jam in the studio. But what you quickly learn about working with musicians of the calibre of Led Zeppelin is that nothing is ever brought to the recording that hasn't been worked over in Jimmy Page's mind to the nth degree."

In fact, the guitar riff Page plays had been something he'd been tinkering with since 1970.

"Of course, it is a fantastic jam, with Bonham and Jonesy especially really going to town. But the tension is very tightly held. I'd set Bonzo's drums up in the conservatory and the sound he got in there was phenomenal. Louder than hell! But they all knew what they were doing. And I love all that James Brown stuff Robert does about taking it to the bridge, because of course there is no bridge in this track. Hence the in-joke ending 'Where's that confounded bridge?'"

Much better was *D'Yer Maker*, a title filched from an old music-hall joke: 'My wife's gone to the West Indies.' 'Jamaica?' 'No, she went of her own accord.' Boom, boom!

Another band composition that critics assumed was another parody, this time of reggae, it was in fact an innovative re-imagining of the form, replete with grafted-on doo-wop vocals. (The question in parenthesis at the bottom of the lyric sheet, "Whatever happened to Rosie and the Originals?" refers to doo-wop singer Rosie Hamlin, whose 1960 hit *Angel Baby* had never been followed up, but who by 1973 was with the Blossoms, then working as a backing-vocal group for Elvis Presley.)

Reggae was a well-established form in the UK by 1973 – Bob Marley's game-changing album *Catch A Fire* was released that year – and Page was a big fan. Kramer says *D'Yer Maker* is his favourite track on the album. "Those huge drums that kick in at the start are like bombs going off. Christ almighty! Just the way he hit them! What's amazing, though, is how he keeps the bombs going off while playing this extraordinarily subtle and brilliant rhythm. The greatest rock drummer of all time. It can never be said enough.

"The whole album had a very upbeat quality to it. There was a unity of spirit and a unity of direction of sound."

Engineer Eddie Kramer

"All credit must also go to Jonesy," Kramer continues, "whose bass takes the reggae rhythm to a wholly different place. I could go on about this one for hours. Suffice to say nothing like it had ever really been attempted by a rock band before. And it caused a lot of controversy when people first heard it. A real love-it-or-hate-it track, which I still love."

The third band composition, *The Ocean*, which closes the album, was another vertiginously upbeat number that contained their most memorable guitar riff since *Bring It On Home* and was so clearly a crowd pleaser in the most elemental sense – Bonham in full Bonzo mode, growlingly counting in the song's pulverising beat. "We've done four already but now we're steady and then they went one … two… three…" Pow!

Already a mainstay of the band's encores long before it was finally released, "this was another one where Bonzo's drums just sound amazing", says Kramer. "Some of the stuff Jimmy asked him to do in Led Zeppelin… it was complicated shit and Jimmy would have to run through it with him a few times. But once he locked in, once he knew precisely what he had to play, then he would fuck with it and blow your mind, put in a fill where you would not expect it.

Kezar Stadium, San Francisco, June 1973. Zeppelin were breaking attendance records on their US tour.

"We'd all be laughing because it was just so insane! But we were going for ambient sound. We utilised every aspect of the house and its grounds as best we could. I remember putting a Fender amp in the fireplace and putting a mic up in there. Jonesy's bass was in another room. Everybody's gear was in a different room. There was no CCTV, but I put talkback mics all around so people could yack to each other."

He adds that the final line about *'The girl who won my heart'* is a reference to Plant's daughter, Carmen, who was three years old at the time.

The only studiedly 'down' track on the album was the one begun two years earlier but remained unfinished until now: Jonesy's windswept and creepy piano-synthesiser opus *No Quarter*, an old pirate saying and a Keith Moon catchphrase. Its chilly ambience – *'Close the door, put out the lights'*, Plant intones solemnly, his voice filtered through distortion – is utterly at odds with the rest of the album, but an exemplary piece of contrasting

work and another track destined to become a cornerstone of Zeppelin's live sets, Jonesy's own personal showcase.

Kramer: "I said this was the album where Jonesy really came into his own, and this is the track that proves it. I wasn't there when they finally recorded it, but they had demo versions of it going back a few years, which I'd heard some of. I seem to recall it had been a little higher tempo, but that when they slowed it down a touch it really started to take shape.

"This is one of the key tracks on the album that really demonstrates that Led Zeppelin could do anything they turned their minds to now – and do it better than anybody else. They were able to really stretch out now and experiment, which allowed the space for Jonesy to come in and do his thing on the arrangements. It wasn't just his brilliance as a keyboard player or even a writer, it was the subtlety of his arrangements, and the economy of notes that made this track such a powerful statement. Genius!"

ALAMY x2

While the previous, fourth, Zeppelin album had benefited from its huge economy with absolutely everything in its right place, *Houses Of The Holy* was less about being perfect, more about letting loose and having fun. Not everybody got it. A fact reflected in the exceedingly mixed reactions it drew from critics and fans. Similar to the fate that awaited *Led Zeppelin III*, which fell foul of having to follow the giant success of *Led Zeppelin II*, for many *Houses Of The Holy* was a letdown after the monumental achievements of its predecessor. Where there was general disappointment that the third album didn't contained anything of the stature of *Whole Lotta Love* or *Heartbreaker*, the knee-jerk reaction to *Houses Of The Holy* was that it lacked something of a similar eminence to *Stairway To Heaven* or *When The Levee Breaks*. In retrospect, however, it clearly signposted the way forward for a band now operating at their giddy peak. The days of grand-statement albums like the first, second and fourth had given way to, as Plant put it, "simple fun". An outlandish concept at a time when a band's artistic stature was still measured by how 'heavy' it was – musically, lyrically, metaphorically. In that sense, the fifth Zeppelin album was a relatively lightweight affair, and therefore, most critics argued, of little real importance.

"Jonesy was a superb arranger, who could conduct an orchestra while playing bass with one hand."

Engineer Eddie Kramer

"Several tracks on this new Led Zep album are simply bad jokes," bleated one typical review in America. Fortunately, not all reviewers were so blinkered. According to short-lived UK music paper *Let It Rock*, the album showed "increasing diversity, humour, and richness, with only moderate self-indulgence".

Fans were equally divided. While *Houses Of* ▷

"[By 1973] we were much more ambitious... We really wanted to take the live performances as far as they could go."

Jimmy Page

The Holy became the band's third album to top the British and American charts, selling more than three million copies in the US, where symbolically it had replaced Elvis Presley's *Aloha From Hawaii* at No.1, it slipped out of the British chart after just 13 weeks, soon overtaken by its still-selling-heavily predecessor.

The obligatory single from *HOTH* in America, *Over The Hills And Far Away*, released in May, also flopped, becoming Zeppelin's first not to reach the Top 50, although *D'Yer Maker*, released six months later, got to No.20. (As usual, neither track was released as a single in the UK.)

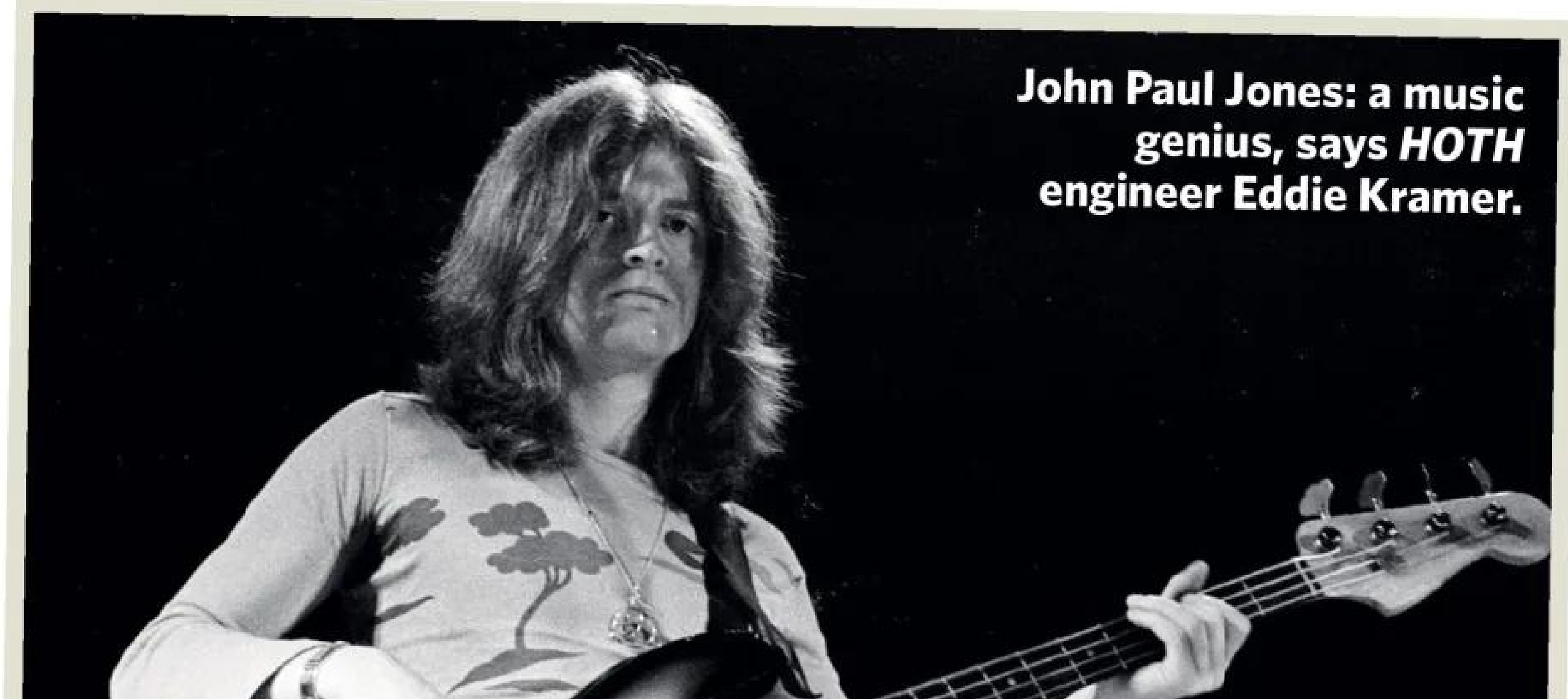
Privately, Page fumed at this latest example of critical disdain. Peter Grant decided it was time for a change of strategy, beginning with the appointment, in time for their next US tour, of their first full-time American PR, Danny Goldberg of Solters, Roskin & Sabinson. SR&S were best known for working with film stars but had recently opened a music division, and with Goldberg having been a freelance writer for *Rolling Stone* – one of the magazines Page and Grant specifically wanted to woo – his inside knowledge made his appointment a done deal.

"Most of the journalists present seemed so shocked that we'd done this," said Page. "One of them said: 'My first question to you, Mister Page, is why are you giving me this interview in the first place?'"

The answer lay in the band's determination to see their public image upgraded and moved on to the same footing as the Stones. "Without getting too egocentric," said Plant, "we thought it was time that people heard something about us other than that we were eating women and throwing the bones out the window."

Not everything ran smoothly, of course, and Bonham had to be restrained after a *Sounds* journalist had affronted him by saying he thought him the greatest drummer in the world, and asked to shake his hand. "I've taken enough shit from you c**ts in the press!" Bonzo screamed, before launching himself at the terrified journo, offering to "give that horrible little fucker an interview he'll never forget!"

According to ELO drummer Bev Bevan, an old mate of Bonham's from Birmingham who happened to run into him in Los Angeles and was shocked by what he saw, "I think he felt he had a reputation to live up to, like Keith Moon. For every one drink I had, he'd order himself six Brandy Alexanders, just showing off, really, knocking them back one after another."



John Paul Jones: a music genius, says *HOTH* engineer Eddie Kramer.

Over time, however, Zep's new PR strategy worked, resulting in *Rolling Stone* finally putting Zeppelin on its cover, with an article by their 16-year-old cub reporter Cameron Crowe.

Crowe was clearly a real-life fan, and the band treated him to one of their most revealing interviews. Page even opened up about Boleskine House, dropping hints as to its hidden purpose by referring directly to "my involvement in magic" and explaining how "I'm attracted by the unknown… all my houses are isolated… A few things have happened that would freak some people out, but I was surprised actually at how composed I was."

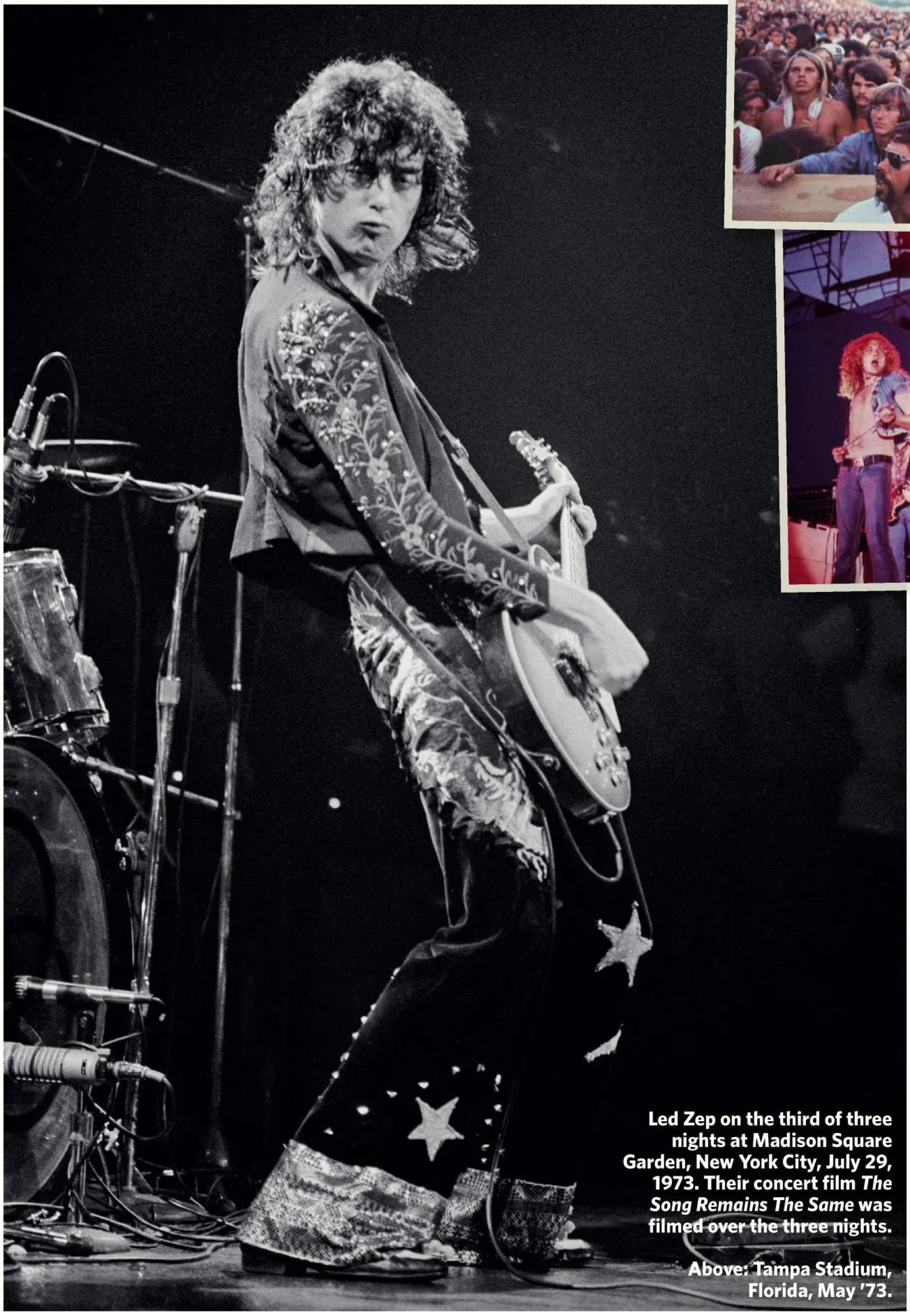
Page went on to say he doubted "whether I'll reach thirty-five. I can't be sure about that," but that he wasn't afraid of death. "That is the greatest mystery of all." Ultimately, he whispered: "I'm still searching for an angel with a broken wing." Then added with a grin: "It's not very easy to find them these days. Especially when you're staying at the Plaza Hotel."

The *Houses Of The Holy* US tour that summer also coincided with a total revamp of the way the band presented itself on stage. The 1973 tour would be their first to feature a professional light show, including lasers, mirror balls and dry ice, as well as a whole new set of stage costumes specially designed for each member. The most flamboyant was Page's glittering moon-and-stars outfit, the buttonless, wide-lapelled jacket flapping open, his flared trousers boasting three symbols down the side of the leg: the top symbol, like an ornate '7', representing Capricorn, his Sun sign, a bastardised 'M' ▷

MAIN ALAMY; INSET: GETTY

All smiles. And who could blame them. Led Zep in '73.

JAMES FORTUNE/ATLASICONS.COM



Led Zep on the third of three nights at Madison Square Garden, New York City, July 29, 1973. Their concert film *The Song Remains The Same* was filmed over the three nights.

Above: Tampa Stadium, Florida, May '73.

"It was hedonistic times. But the thing is the playing was always there. On maybe just a very rare occasion did it suffer."

Jimmy Page

representing Scorpio, his ascendant sign, and below that what looked like a '69' representing his Moon sign.

"It's a work of art, that suit," Page told me. "Originally we saw the whole essence of our live performance as something that the audience listened to very carefully, picking up on what was going on, the spontaneity and musicianship. And you can't do that if you're running around the stage all night. Or at least we couldn't back then."

By 1973, however, "we were much more ambitious, in that respect. We really wanted to take the live performances as far as they could go."

It was a similar story off stage, where Page was now going three or four nights without sleep and boasting of living on a liquid-only diet. "I knew exactly what I wanted to do," he would tell me years later. "It was hedonistic times, you know? But the thing is the playing was always there. On maybe just a very rare occasion did it suffer – a rare occasion relative to the volume of tours. But we wanted to be on that edge, it fed into the music."

Also joining them on that tour was Atlantic Records UK and European president Phil Carson, who recalls: "The rules hadn't been written yet. And even where they had, we broke them. Like when the band played a huge outdoor stadium, in Tampa, Florida, and there was nearly 60,000 people there, breaking the record set by The Beatles of 55,000 at Shea Stadium. I don't remember much about the gig other than the awesome size of the crowd. Don't forget this was for one band, not a festival bill or even a headline act with support bands. This was just Led Zeppelin on their own. I'll never forget the reaction when they came on stage. Mind-blowing!"

The '73 US tour also included a huge outdoor show at the Atlanta Braves football stadium, where a crowd of 49,236 paid to see them, beating the previous record of just over 33,000 set by The Beatles in 1965. The following night in Tampa, Florida, which Carson referenced, drew an even bigger crowd, making it the most lucrative single performance in show-business history.

As the limousine pulled up at the backstage gates, Plant turned to manager Peter Grant and said: "Fucking hell, G! Where did all these people come from?"

Speaking with Page about it years later, he recalled how "that was one of the most surprising times. I knew that we were pretty big, but I hadn't imagined it to be on that sort of scale. In fact, even now I still find it difficult to take it all in, just how much it all meant, you know?"

This was the new post-*Stairway To Heaven* world, where the children of the revolution, the new boogaloo dudes, worshipped and were ruled over by Led Zeppelin. Back when giants walked the Earth, before rules, before consequences, before anyone knew what hit them.

For Zeppelin, 1973 was also the year when Icarus flew closest to the sun, the heat generated by the *Houses Of The Holy* tour reaching its apotheosis with their sold-out three-night run at Madison Square Garden in New York in June – later immortalised in the fantastically over-the-top concert film *The Song Remains The Same*.

"For me, Madison Square Garden was a seminal moment," Plant later told me. "Until then I don't think I could ever have imagined something like that, where there was so much energy coming and going between us and the audience. It was like having a dream come true that you never knew you had. Afterwards, I thought: 'Now we know what happened to Judy Garland!'"

GETTY x3

The Soundtrack Of My Life

Singer and songwriter ***Steve Harley*** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Jo Kendall**

EDDI READER: GETTY

As a teenager he'd been involved in newspaper journalism, but by 1970 Deptford lad Steve Harley was taking a guitar around London folk clubs, going from a "weekend mod" phase to being a "weekend hippie". The troubadour side mixed with the emerging glam and art-rock scenes, and Harley found fame with the wonderfully arch and flamboyant Cockney Rebel. Currently on the road with his Acoustic Band, he tells *CR* about some of the sparks that lit his imagination.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

Before Radio 1 existed we had The Light Programme on the airwaves. My mother was a jazz singer, and on Sundays there'd be big-band music and she'd sing along in the kitchen. For pop it would have been from my older cousins who were buying Buddy Holly and Elvis. I was very big on Buddy, even up to this day.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

My first live performances were as a floor-spotter, which they call open-mic now, in folk clubs – you'd put your hand up in the audience to be spotted and get up and play. I was on the dole for a year playing in [clubs such as] Bunjies, Les Cousins, The Troubadour. The first song I ever performed was in 1970 and called *Laid In The Shade*. It was absolute rubbish, but the tune worked. I went back to it in 1974 and added new lyrics. That became *Make Me Smile*.

THE GUITAR HERO

Frank Zappa. He was a one-off – unique as a composer, as a wit, and then as a guitar player. He played jazz, basically, and he hardly ever bent a note, it was all just brilliant technique. Play *Stink-Foot* from *Apostrophe (')*; he rips off this solo out of nowhere that is just beyond historic.

THE SINGER

I took more pleasure than I can tell you in acquiring the services of Eddi Reader. On my latest album [*Uncovered*], Eddi can break your heart. That's the voice that most women would want. She duets with me on an old Newfoundland folk song, *Star Of Belle Isle*, and that was pretty special. She came and played with my band, a string quartet and gospel singers in Glasgow last year. When she walked on I didn't even introduce them. I walked off and she did a couple of numbers to start, and that was a big moment.

THE SONGWRITER

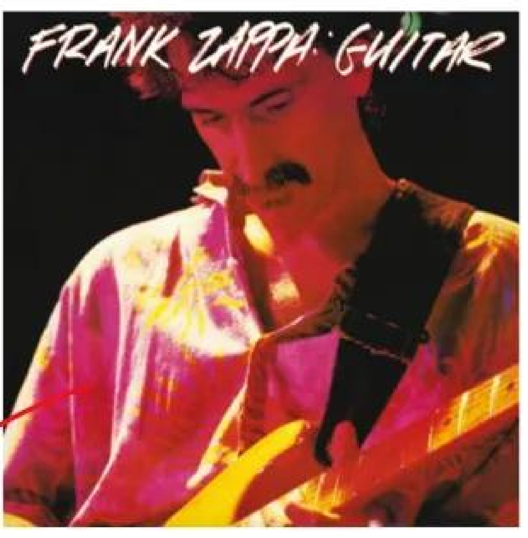
It's Dylan, but I'd be hard-pressed to put him above Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell or Cat Stevens. These people are astonishing. I must put Bob at the top because he's the one I keep fighting to interpret, to understand the mystery. The others are more straightforward.

THE WORST RECORD I MADE

In the eighties I made several tracks that were going to be on an album called *El Grand Senor*, and I allowed a couple of keyboard players to go rampant – in those days it was all multi-synthesisers, polyphonic. Three tracks ended up on an album called *Yes You Can*. I heard one or two lately, because fans have been asking for us to include these titles live, so I'm listening to them at home and thinking: "God, that's a bloody racket."

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

It's Dylan, but I'm torn between *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde On Blonde*. They're both just ridiculously brilliant pieces of work. But if I was on a desert island it would be *Blonde On Blonde*, because I could spend my life working out the meanings and the allegories inside *Visions Of Johanna*, which mesmerises me, frankly.



THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

Longpigs. Crispin [Hunt, vocals] was a highly talented young man who now heads [royalties collection agency] PRS. Richard Hawley was the lead guitarist; he can write a song or two! I saw them on *Top Of The Pops* playing *Lost Myself*, and I recognised something much deeper than this pseudo neo-punk thing they were doing. On their two albums every song cuts the mustard. I thought I was seeing a stadium band in-the-making, then they were gone.

THE CULT HERO

For someone who's not mainstream-famous but is massively talented, I would say Martin Simpson. He's written some fantastic songs and is lyrically brilliant. It's got that Yorkshireman's eye for detail when they get straight to the point. He played on the last album.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

Reach Out (I'll Be There) by The Four Tops. I was a huge Tamla fan as a teenager, and for me and my pals in south London, Motown was our dance music. This is also for my first love and lover, Glenda White from Wickford. *Reach Out* was our song.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

I travel mostly in silence. But when I am in the mood to listen to something – like last week, when I drove five hundred miles for a photo shoot – I play Beethoven, the greatest of them all. There's a top line of talent that makes me swoon: Virginia Woolf, Steinbeck, Hemingway, TS Eliot. Beethoven is at the top of the highest echelons.

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

A Case Of You by Joni Mitchell. '*I could drink a case of you, still I'd be on my feet.*' It's a beautiful observation and image. It breaks my heart with passion.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

I'll do a Bowie and I won't have one [a funeral]! But if I do it's back to Zappa, and *Peaches En Regalia* from *Hot Rats*. It's a fabulous melody and production, and quite uplifting. I don't want misery.

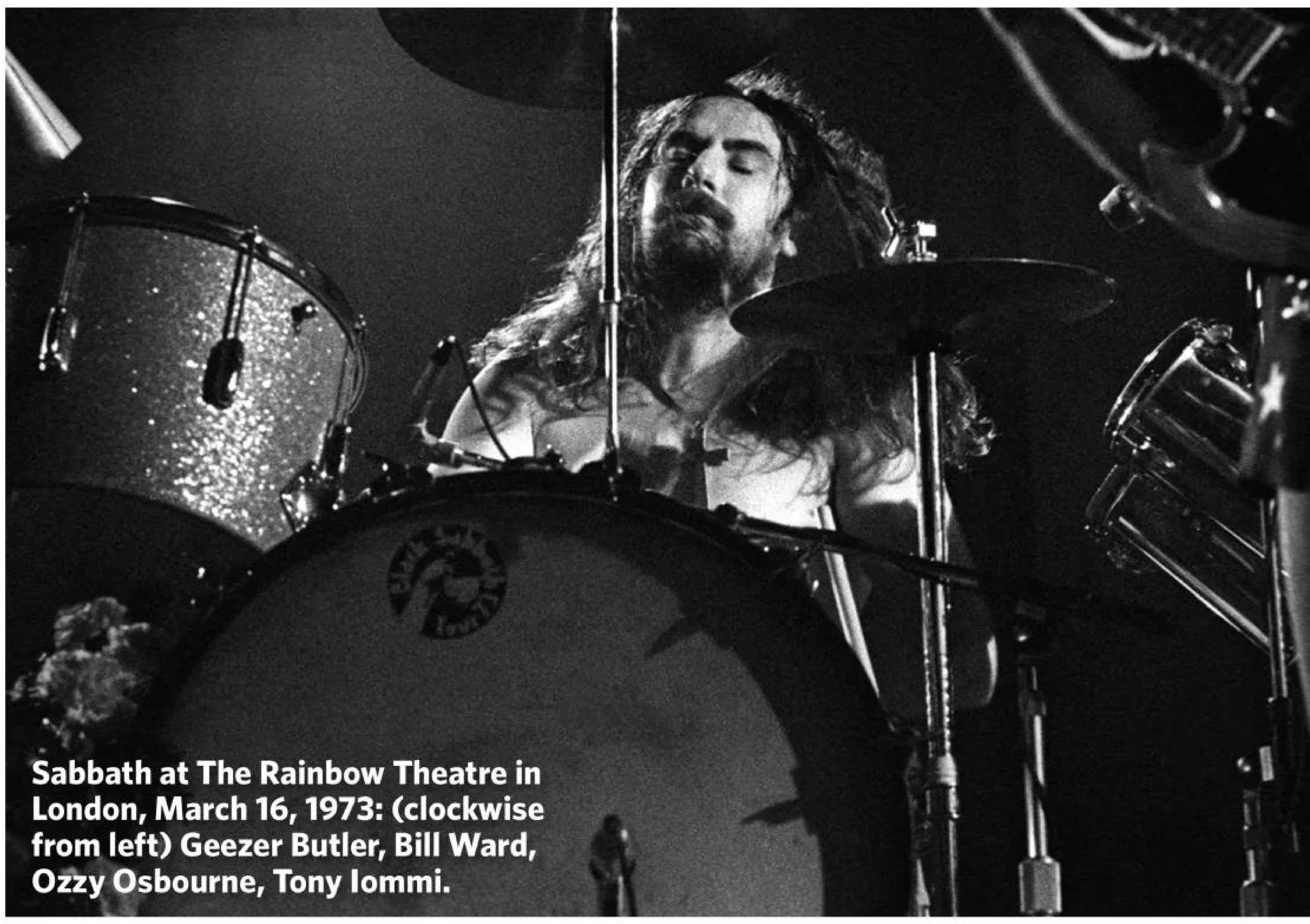
"Eddi Reader can break your heart. That's the voice that most women would want."

bloody hell

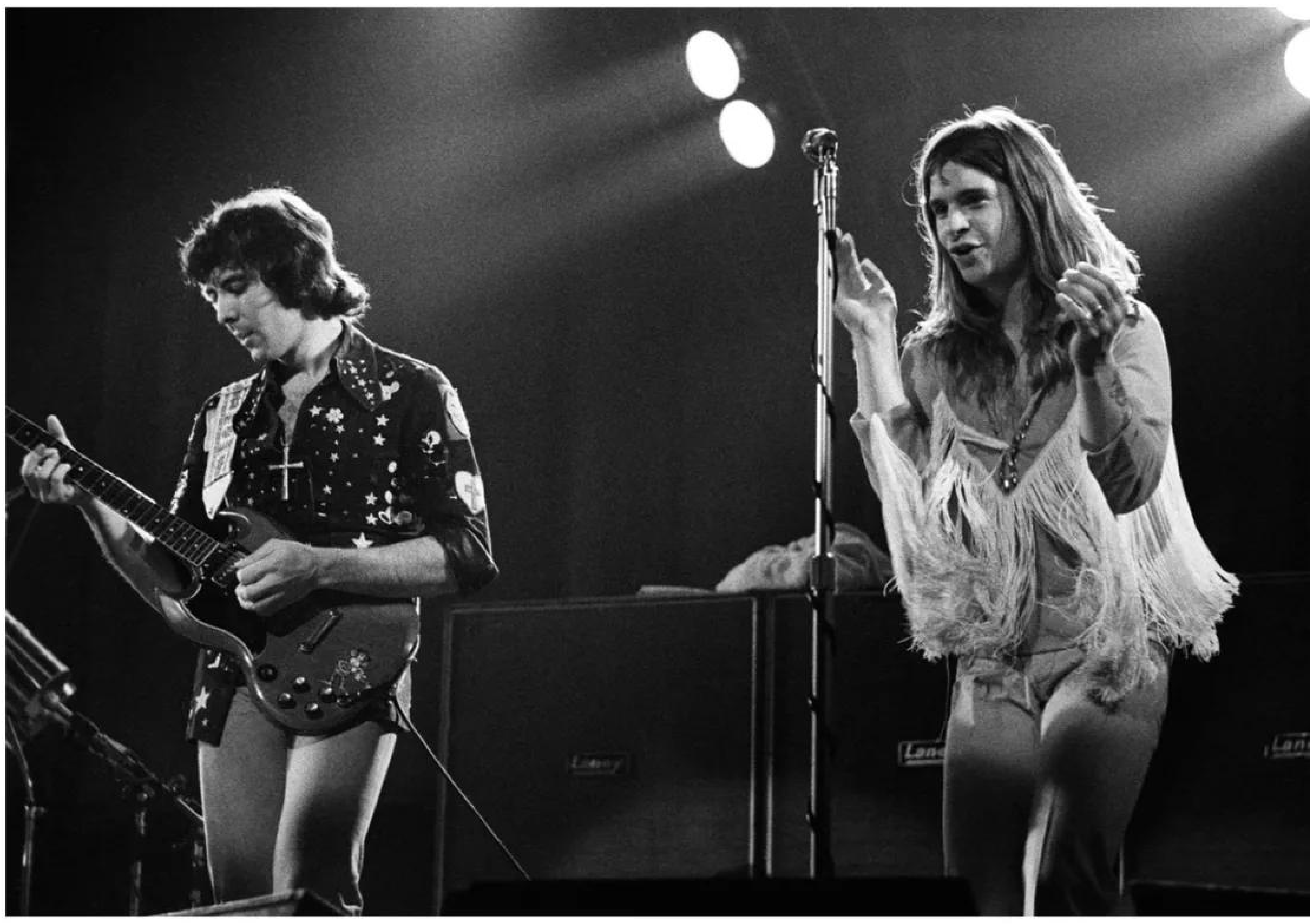
Write some songs, get into studio, come out with an album. It worked before. But when it came to making the follow-up to *Vol. 4*, **Black Sabbath** couldn't even get started. "We'd spend all day farting about and end up with nothing usable." This is the story of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*.

Words: **Mick Wall**

PHOTO: PETER MAZEL / AVALON



Sabbath at The Rainbow Theatre in London, March 16, 1973: (clockwise from left) Geezer Butler, Bill Ward, Ozzy Osbourne, Tony Iommi.



March 17, 1973. Black Sabbath play The Rainbow Theatre in London's Finsbury Park. It's the twenty-fourth of 25 shows across Britain and Europe that they have completed in a 32-day period. Everyone is exhausted, propped up on speed, coke, dope, acid – anything they can get their hands on to keep going. It's the band's second of two shows at The Rainbow, their last night in London, and there will be a big party afterwards. The following day they will lie comatose, flopped across the tiny seats of a small propeller plane as it bundles them north to Newcastle for the tour's final show, at the City Hall.

Right now, though, Ozzy Osbourne, Sabbath's 24-year-old officially 'loony' singer, knows only the Rainbow spotlight and what it's doing to his head. Grabbing onto the mic stand with both hands, to stop himself from falling, he yells into the darkness: "Are you high?" The audience, almost exclusively male, greatcoated and long-haired, respond with a muted: "Yeaahhh…"

Ozzy tries again. "I said *are you high*?"

Same response, only a little louder this time.

Ozzy stares at them forlornly. "*Are you high*?!" he screams at the top of his voice.

This time the place erupts.

"Good!" he tells them. "Cos so am I!"

Tony Iommi swipes at his guitar, and the ugly, tormented riff to *Snowblind* detonates, bassist Geezer Butler and drummer and Bill Ward thrumming as the building shudders. This is what it's all about in 1973, man. Not all that glam stuff you see on TV, but the fully loaded realisation of what rock music has become: hard, vicious, undeniable. And completely critic-proof.

"It was a whole new era for us. We felt really open on that album. It was a great atmosphere, good time."

Geezer Butler

What no one knows is that a few days after the Rainbow show there'll be a phone call that quietly cancels what should have been Sabbath's next US tour. Promoters will be furious. But eight months on the road has nearly killed them. Now all Iommi wants is to get back into the studio and produce the masterpiece that will, finally, he is determined, prove that Black Sabbath are as important, as worthy of serious consideration, as the bands they have been outselling, like the Stones and Deep Purple; like anyone you would care to name, with the sole exception of Led Zeppelin, who are now outselling everybody.

The other members of Sabbath want it too, but not nearly as much as Iommi does. The others still feel more comfortable sitting at the back of the class, sneering at teacher. Not Iommi. He wants Sabbath to carve out their own hallowed place in the pantheon, and for the name Tony Iommi to be up there, where he feels it belongs, alongside those of Jimmy Page and Ritchie Blackmore, Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton.

As he complained in an *NME* interview that year: "On drawing power and album sales we can compare with groups like Zeppelin and The Who, although we seldom get recognition for the fact." He wasn't just a heavy rock guitarist, he complained. "I've got a few tapes of Deep Purple in the car, but I prefer to listen to things like Peter Paul And Mary, Sinatra, the Moody Blues and The Carpenters."

He was an artist. People didn't understand. "I want to move to a bigger house," he said. To get away from everybody so he could work undisturbed, the Phantom Of The Rock Opera.

"I have a big house with a swimming pool now,

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but I want one with tennis courts and a studio, so I have everything in the house and don't have to go out at all…"

Iommi had recently fallen for Susan Snowdon, a "posh bird" introduced to him by Sabbath's manager. Snowdon said she was a singer; Iommi offered to write for her. However, as he recounted in his 2011 memoir *Iron Man*: "She came up to my house one day and it was a bit awkward. I found out she couldn't sing – and she found out I hadn't written a song for her. But we did go out to dinner, and that's how it all started."

They were worlds apart, opposites that attracted. But it was clear from the day they got married in November 1973 that they were destined to remain strangers throughout the seven years they would be together.

Susan's wealthy father invited the newlyweds to move into his 200-room mansion on several hundred acres of grounds halfway between Birmingham and London. Iommi finally had his house with 'everything' and didn't have to go out again – ever.

Between tours, while the rest of the band took their wives and girlfriends on long holidays, Iommi stayed behind to work alone in his new home studio, snorting coke and 'creating' long into the night.

Iommi craved the one thing money couldn't buy: respect. Sabbath had been going to release a double live album, à la Deep Purple, whose double live *Made In Japan*, released in December '72, was now a colossal international hit. Plus a live album cost relatively nothing to make, an idea that particularly excited everyone.

But when Iommi listened back to the tapes, he was aghast. This was primeval Sabbath, heavy as hobnailed boots trudging through mud, obnoxiously loud and overbearing. Exciting for the audiences that were there for the shows, perhaps, but utterly enervating on record, as draining as a coke comedown. And as a signifier of where Iommi wanted Sabbath to go, completely off-message. He binned the idea.

"Someone would come in with another ounce of f★★king powder, and you'd be up there talking bullshit for three weeks."

Ozzy Osbourne

And so it was that in the summer of 1973 Sabbath found themselves back in Los Angeles, working on their fifth album.

Because it was just easier, they retreated to the same Bel Air mansion where they'd conceived their previous album, *Vol.4*, and immediately called the same drug dealers and groupies that had made their time there the year before so 'inspiring'.

But while the rest of the band thought they were making what would effectively be *Vol. 5*, Iommi had bigger ideas. Unlike previous Sabbath albums, most of which had been recorded on the run, between tours, this time things would be markedly different, he decided. Instead of simply conjuring a mood and going with it as they might a live jam, they would step back and take time to consider what they had and how they could improve it, and worry later about how they would or wouldn't be able to reproduce the new material live. Build something up-to-the-minute that the fans and the critics could begin a whole new conversation about; alter perceptions so that Black Sabbath no longer laboured under the imprimatur of a loud, clanking heavy rock band, but were something more exhilarating and nimbler on its feet. Something where the music really did come first, where it could be allowed to rehabilitate itself into something more in line with new headline makers like Yes, whose daring 1973 double album *Tales From Topographic Oceans* would ostensibly have just one track per side of vinyl, and Pink Floyd, who with the release that same year of *The Dark Side Of The Moon* had left behind their earlier image as psychedelic prophets to metamorphose into progressive rock goliaths. Concept albums were now de rigeur for the rock artist looking to be taken seriously. Iommi listened to The Who's 1973 double album *Quadrophenia*, read the liquorice reviews, and felt that Sabbath were being left to die by the side of the road. ▷

There were also commercial pressures to consider. For all their understandable satisfaction with the way *Vol. 4* turned out – the first Sabbath album not to be made under the gun of budgetary restrictions – it had essentially been more of the same, but with a more polished production sheen. And although it had gone gold in America, *Vol. 4* had reached only No.13 in the chart, lower than either *Paranoid* or *Master Of Reality*. It was the same story at home in Britain, where it stalled at No.8.

Suddenly, Sabbath's previously skyward sales trajectory had tapered off. They still sold tickets for shows, but their fan base had given a clear indication that it already had enough Sabbath albums to be going on with and maybe didn't need any more.

The perception was that unlike The Who or Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath had stood still musically. With their heads buried in booze and coke, Ozzy, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward might not have noticed it, but in the summer of 1973, as Iommi struggled to come up with what he knew had to be genuinely new and startling music, he was painfully aware that it was now or never for Black Sabbath.

Buoyed by the full repertoire of rock'n'roll remedies, Iommi immersed himself in non-stop 36-hour shifts at the Record Plant. As he told me: "It became a ritual. Every time we'd do an album, we'd get a load of dope and then some coke, and off we'd go. We'd be there all bloody night writing stuff, and I never used to want to leave the studio."

This time, though, the old tricks simply weren't working.

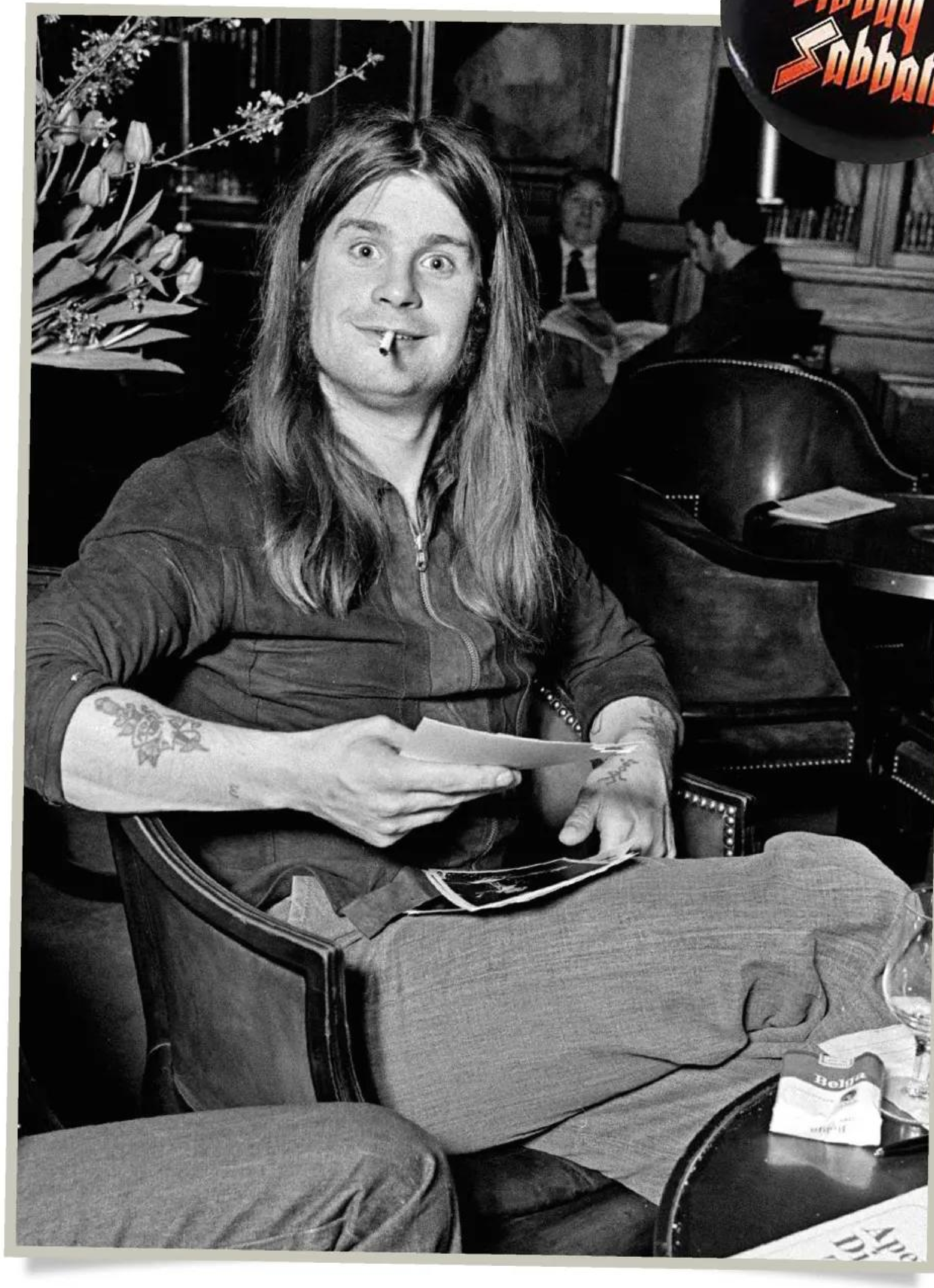
"We thought we'd go back to LA," he said. "Do everything the same – the house, studio… everything exactly the same. But nothing happened. We just dried up. It all just fell to pieces for us."

He began to get furious with the others, then desperate with himself. One day, he walked into a hairdresser on Hollywood Boulevard and ordered them to cut his hair – short. When he got back to the Bel Air mansion, he also shaved off his moustache. Iommi became unrecognisable to his own band – even to himself. Yet still things would not fall into the place in the studio. Finally, in June, he threw in the towel and ordered the band back to England – in order to try to re-establish some sense of normality – before starting again.

Ironically, the place Sabbath chose to regroup was even weirder than the demented atmosphere they had fled from in LA. Clearwell Castle, an 18th-century neo-Gothic pile in the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire, had been built for the Member of Parliament Thomas Wyndham in 1728 to replace an older house that had occupied the same site. Constructed of local stone with battlements, and an ornate gateway formed by two huge towers, it had been restored to former glories in the 1950s by the son of the former estate under-gardener, Frank Yeates.

When Yeates died in 1973, he left behind within the castle a newly built rehearsal room and basement recording studio. Having noted the burgeoning number of large countryside properties now being occupied – at no little cost – by the new generation of album-oriented rock sophisticates, Yeates had shrewdly decided to get in on the act, and for the rest of the decade the dark, atmospheric basement of Clearwell Castle would be temporary home for a number of high-profile rock acts recording there, including Mott The Hoople, Bad Company, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin.

The first band to rent and move into the property for such purposes – somewhat fittingly, given the subterranean aspect of the facilities – was Black Sabbath.



"*Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was our final record. Then it started to drift around all over the place."

Ozzy Osbourne

What they did not discover until they were actually sleeping there was that the castle was reputedly haunted by a mischievous female ghost whose modus operandi was apparently entering locked rooms and leaving them in a mess, as though a strong wind had blown in through the windows. She was also said to sing lullabies to her ghost child on the landing at night while playing a tinkling musical box. The band were not told any of this, lest it should freak them out. But they certainly felt the vibes.

The first few days they were there, rehearsing new material in the former dungeons, they all saw a shadowy figure in a long black cloak hurry past the door. Wary from so many previous experiences of black-robed Sabbath fans making their unwelcome presence felt, Iommi stopped playing and, with a roadie, ran after the rapidly retreating figure.

"They saw him go into this other door at the end of the corridor," Butler recalled. "They were shouting at him, because they thought he was some lunatic that got into the castle. They went into the room where he had gone into and there was nobody in there."

When they asked if any other visitors were staying at the castle, the owner told them: "Oh, that's just a ghost." The castle was full of ghosts, he shrugged. The band stood and stared. Everyone was doing so much coke, it felt like they already had a million ghosts inside their heads. Iommi had lately become more and more convinced of his own growing occult powers.

"The whole group communicates on a very close level," he informed one interviewer solemnly. "Like, we have what you could almost call a third eye. We can sense with each other what is going to happen. We've had actual experiences. One I remember, Geezer was asleep, and he must have astral travelled. I was stuck in the lift. He dreamt this. When I woke him up, he said: 'I'm glad it's you, cos I just dreamt you were stuck in the lift.' These are quite regular occurrences. They used to frighten me at first, till I got used to it."

Continually coked up, strung out on paranoia and bad dreams about ghosts and castles, assaulted by Iommi's manic perfectionism, resulted in hours of lost time. "We'd spend all day farting about and end up with nothing usable," Iommi glowered.

In desperation to meet Iommi's demands for something – anything – new to add to the Sabbath gene pool, the band tried everything to find different sounds and textures. And, gradually, things did begin to happen.

"We'd end up coming up with all these brilliant ideas," said Iommi. "Like trying things going off the piano, into the piano and then mic-ing up the piano strings to hear different sounds."

At one point, Bill Ward took an anvil he'd found while poking around the castle's outhouses and recorded himself dropping it into a barrel of water. Iommi brought in unusual instruments that he felt went well with the castle's permanent-midnight ambience: river-deep guitars, old-school orchestration (name-checked almost apologetically on the album sleeve as The Phantom Fiddlers), even bagpipes for what would become the album's big sign-off epic, its very own *Stairway To Heaven* grand finale, the monumental *Spiral Architect*. Butler's final message was ▷

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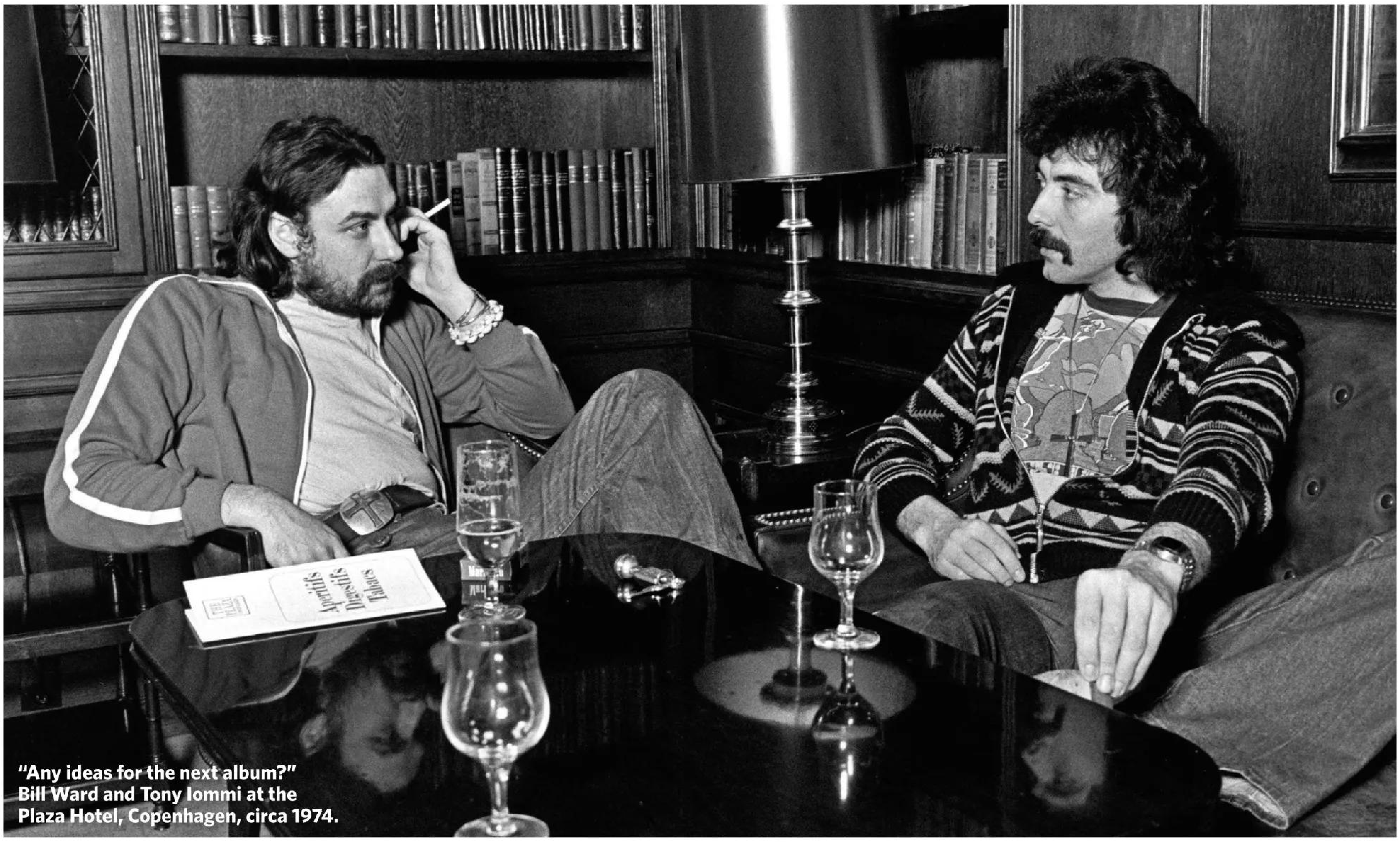
Black Sabbath: (l-r) Bill Ward, Ozzy Osbourne, Geezer Butler, Tony Iommi.

PETER MAZEL / AVALON



"Any ideas for the next album?" Bill Ward and Tony Iommi at the Plaza Hotel, Copenhagen, circa 1974.

"We thought we'd go back to LA, do everything the same... But we just dried up. It all just fell to pieces for us."

Tony Iommi on working on *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*

reassuringly universal: *'I look upon my earth and feel the warmth and know that it's good…'* The tacked-on sound of applause at the end added an extra level of funhouse grandiosity.

For all the intensity, there would be a lightness of touch to the new material too. With Iommi in full control of proceedings now, the Sabbath sound became less about thuggish riffing and brutal rhythms, and far more about a newly mellifluent style that could embroider even woolly-mammoth riffs like *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, the heavyweight title track, its unexpected sideways contortions, jazz-like, awash with zinging electric and acoustic guitars and Butler's pulsing new fuzz bass: an instant classic to go with *War Pigs* and *Iron Man*.

Next track, *A National Acrobat*, twists the sound into more recognisably malevolent Sabbath territory, yet even then the shift is all space and time, with Iommi leading the band into a whole new sonic galaxy.

The band were also having greater fun with lyrics. Ozzy singing *'When worlds collide, I'm trapped inside, my embryonic cell'* might sound like it's from Butler's HG Wells-obsessed vocabulary, but in fact, he told me, *A National Acrobat* "is about wanking. Not that anybody got it." That is, a song about wanking "told from the sperms' point of view".

The only droopy moment was the now seemingly obligatory acoustic instrumental, titled *Fluff* – named after Alan 'Fluff' Freeman, Radio 1's voice of rock in the 70s, whose Saturday afternoon show was famous for the listeners' letters that always seemed to begin: "Dear Fluff, more Sabbs, more ELP…"

The novelty of such interludes had long-since worn off. Iommi was insistent, however, that the band continue with them, as part of his attempt to demonstrate how much more there was to Sabbath than blunt-force trauma-metal.

The rest of the new material, though, found Sabbath touching new heights: *Sabbra Cadabra* was pure, bounding rock'n'roll, its *'Lovely lady make love all night long'* lyrics made-up on the spot by Ozzy, based on the preposterous voice-overs on some of the German porn films he'd been watching. Butler cohered them into lyrics, and Yes keyboard player Rick Wakeman was brought in to add some honky-tonk piano and cathedral-like synthesiser. The vocals and guitar were run through a processor that gave them a futuristic sheen.

Wakeman, said Iommi, "was wild back then". Certainly too wild for Yes, who had opened for Sabbath in the US some years before. "Rick used to travel with us, and not Yes, for some reason," Iommi said with a chuckle. When the beer-and-curry quaffing Wakeman left the brown rice-eating Yes later the same year, there was some discussion about bringing him into the Sabbath fold full time. But Wakeman had had enough of the band-on-the-run lifestyle. When months later he had the first of what would eventually be three heart attacks, his decision not to join Sabbath just as they were reaching the low-water mark of their own 'personal issues' seemed prudent. ⊳

Precious metal: Black Sabbath in 1973 with gold discs for *Vol.4*.

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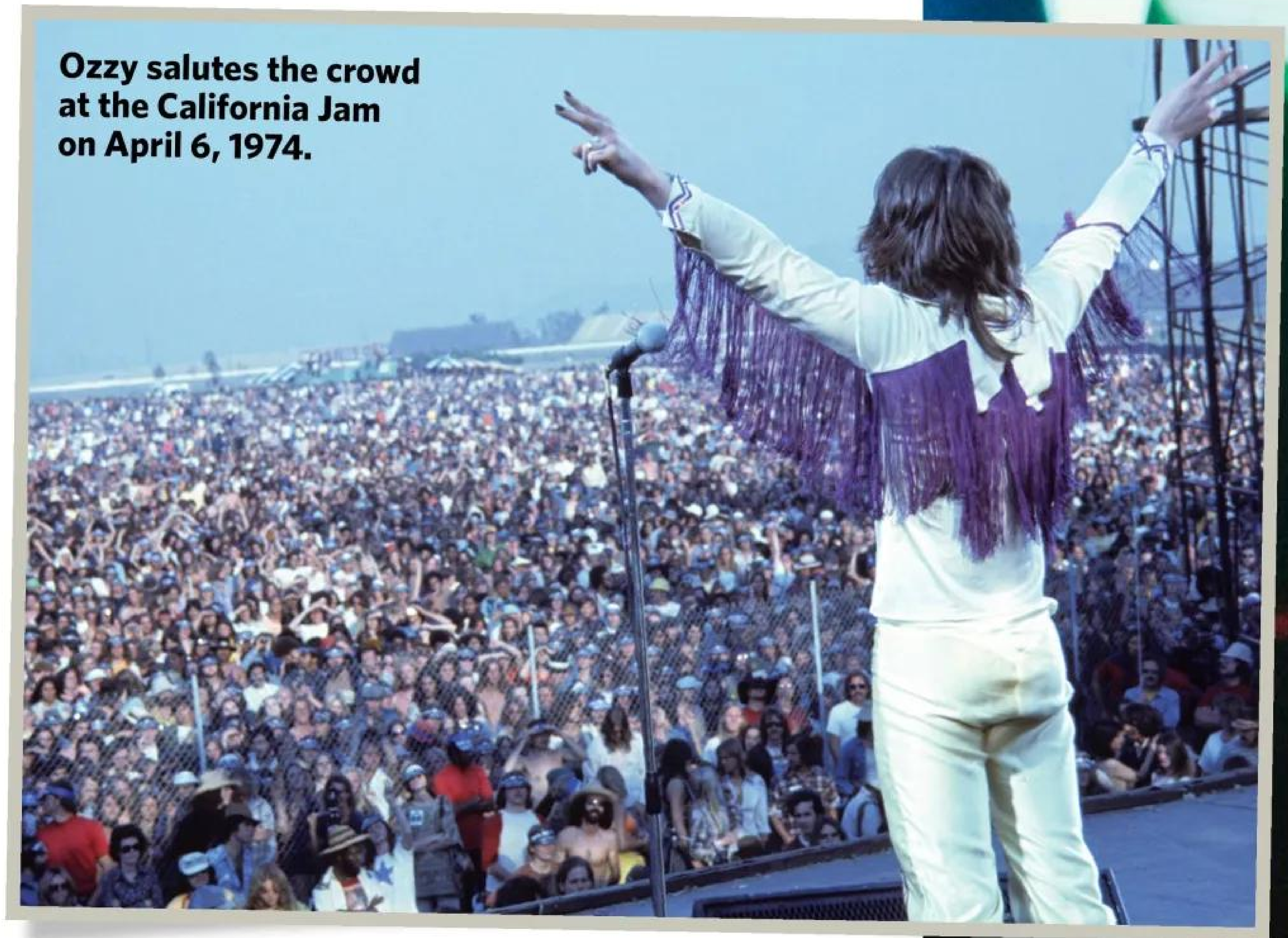


Ozzy salutes the crowd at the California Jam on April 6, 1974.

The four tracks on side two of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* were similarly inspired, similarly lyrically playful, similarly unhinged. On *Killing Yourself To Live* they gave a glimpse into the fear and loathing behind the scenes, its crunching bass and groove-laden drums over a bed of synthesised vocals and guitar lending it an air of authentic melodrama, Ozzy issuing his entreaty over the lost-in-space bridge: '*Smoke it… Get high!*' It's the same feeling on *Looking For Today*, with the days of meat-hook riffs firmly in the past as the band build on a galloping new buzz that is so streamlined and catchy it could have come from Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* album. The classic Sabbath air of cobwebbed mystery had not been lost, just refurbished for the mid-70s. On *Who Are You* the piercing synthesisers summon an atmosphere of insomniacal mania as Ozzy pleads: '*Please I beg you tell me, in the name of hell, who are you?*' before the ascending *Bolero* piano brings the whole deranged monstrosity full-circle.

"We weren't getting on very well. Then Tony came up with the riff for *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*..."

Geezer Butler

As Butler said: "It was a whole new era for us. We felt really open on that album. It was a great atmosphere, good time, great coke!" It was, he said more seriously, "like Part Two of your life… Right before that we were in a terrible slump. We were all exhausted from touring. We weren't getting on very well. Then Tony came up with the riff for *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* and everybody sparked to life."

It looked like a new dawn. But it was all an illusion. As Ozzy later said: "*Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was our final record. Then it started to drift around all over the place. See, our idea of making a good record was to run and find some new location. We thought, if you travel somewhere new, it's kind of like a new adventure. So you'd get there and for the first few days you'd jam about a bit, and then you'd be back to your old ways. You'd be locked in your own heads. Someone would come in with another ounce of fucking powder and you'd be up there talking bullshit for three weeks, you know?"

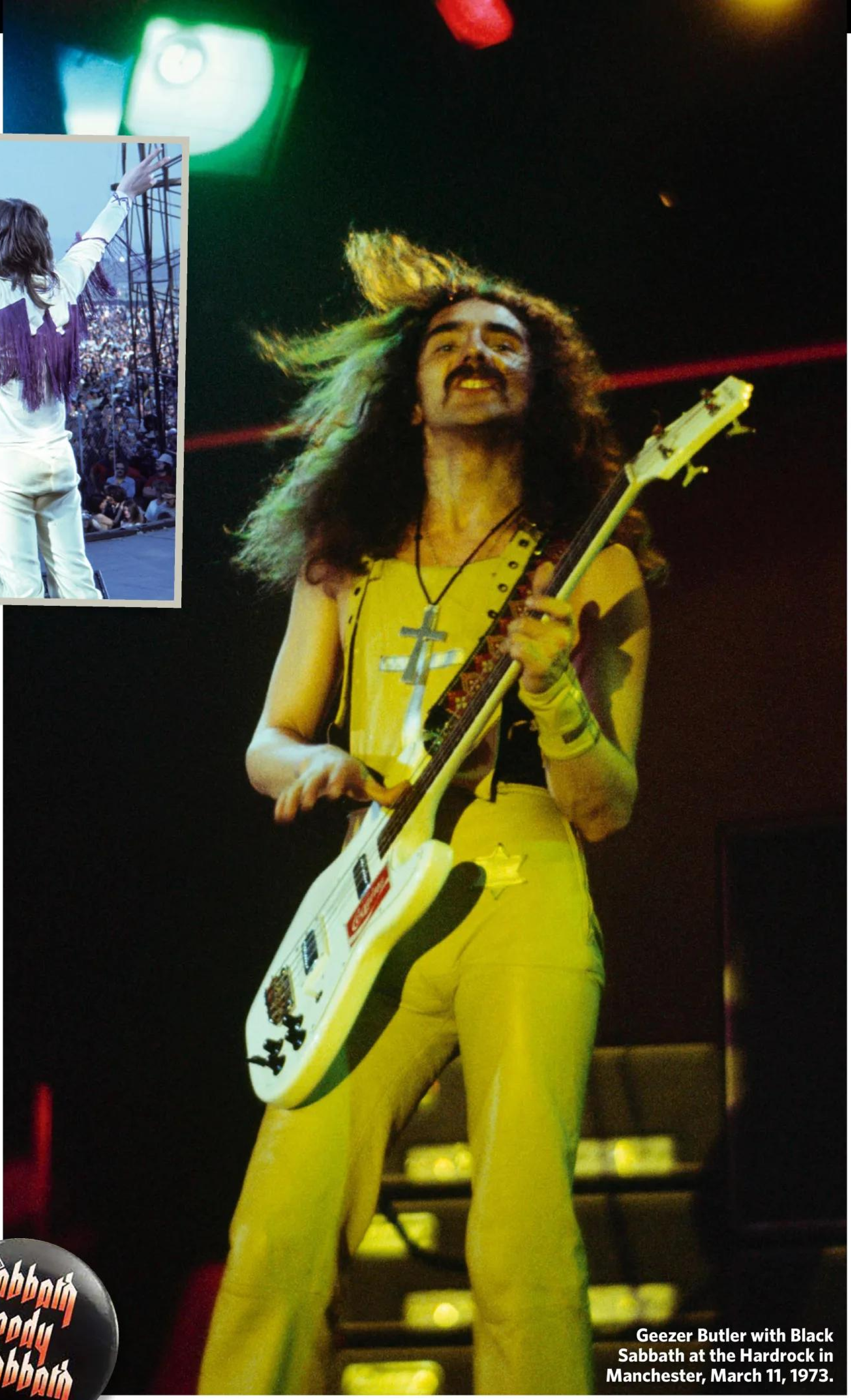
The distress signals were already flashing red by the time *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was released in Britain on December 3, 1973. It became Sabbath's biggest-charting album since *Paranoid* three years before, eventually plateauing at No.4. In the US, where it was released a month later, it also reversed the downward chart trend, and reached No.11.

What it didn't do, for Tony Iommi, anyway, was quash the doubters and naysayers that still wanted to make it their mission to trounce everything Sabbath did. Iommi was delighted, however, to finally read something good about one of their albums in *Rolling Stone*.

In his review of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, Gordon Fletcher wrote in that magazine: "Black Sabbath's major contribution has been to successfully capture the gist of specifically seventies culture through their music. They relate to this impersonal, mechanical decade much as Delta bluesmen and their Chicago spin-offs related to their eras – by synthesizing collective feelings and giving their contemporaries hope by revealing the disaffection that unites all of them. In that remote but real sense, Black Sabbath might well be considered true Seventies bluesmen."

Well that was a load of pretentious old bollocks, of course. They knew that. But Black Sabbath were at least getting the kind of heavyweight critical respect Tony Iommi felt was their due, their right, the guitarist locked away in his hotel suite, working his way through another ounce of coke, bloodthirsting for revenge.

It was the end of the beginning.



Geezer Butler with Black Sabbath at the Hardrock in Manchester, March 11, 1973.

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THE ★CLASSIC★ ROCK INTERVIEW

ANDY SUMMERS

The unfeasibly young-looking 80-year-old talks about conquering the world alongside "two total arseholes" in The Police, his 'apprenticeship' with Zoot Money and others, life after The Police, the reunion, his long-time passion for photography, and much more.

Interview: **Paul Rees**

By his own judgement, Andy Summers does not like to be idle. Isn't suited to a life of leisure. The late-March morning when we talk is a case in point. Only just returned to his home in Los Angeles from playing a run of shows in Brazil with his Police tribute band Call The Police, he was up early editing the file of photographs he took on the trip. Photography is Summers's other great passion, seriously so. His black-and-white portraits are handsome and enigmatic. Rumpled hotel rooms and nocturnal ephemera are a speciality, the locations the exotic preserve of the globe-trotting rock superstar.

Now a spry 80-year-old, Summers has been famous for six decades as one third of The Police alongside Sting and Stewart Copeland. The band have sold 80 million records and counting, their run of hits beginning with *Roxanne* in April 1979. They've broken up twice, in 1985 and then again in 2008, rancorously on both occasions. Ten years older than both of his erstwhile bandmates, Summers was well-established as a guitarist before The Police and has continued to plough his own furrow apart from the band.

Born in the Lancashire market town of Poulton-le-Fylde on New Year's Eve, 1942, he grew up in Bournemouth, and took piano lessons before picking up the guitar. At 19 he relocated to London with his friend Zoot Money. Operating as Zoot Money's Big Roll Band, they gained a foothold on the capital's then blossoming R&B club scene. By London's Summer of Love in 1967, he and Money were garbed in white robes and kaftans and playing psychedelic rock with the short-lived Dantalian's Chariot. Afterwards, Summers passed through the line-ups of Soft Machine and Eric Burdon And The Animals, before moving to LA for five years, where he studied classical guitar and composition at California State University.

Returning to London in 1972, he soon established himself as a regular on the session circuit. On October 26, 1975, he filled in for Mike Oldfield to perform *Tubular Bells* with the Northern Concert Orchestra at Newcastle City Hall. Opening the show that night was local band Last Exit, whose singer and bassist was Sting. Eighteen months later, Summers joined ex-Gong bassist Mike Howlett's Strontium 90, which also included Sting and Curved Air's American former drummer ▷

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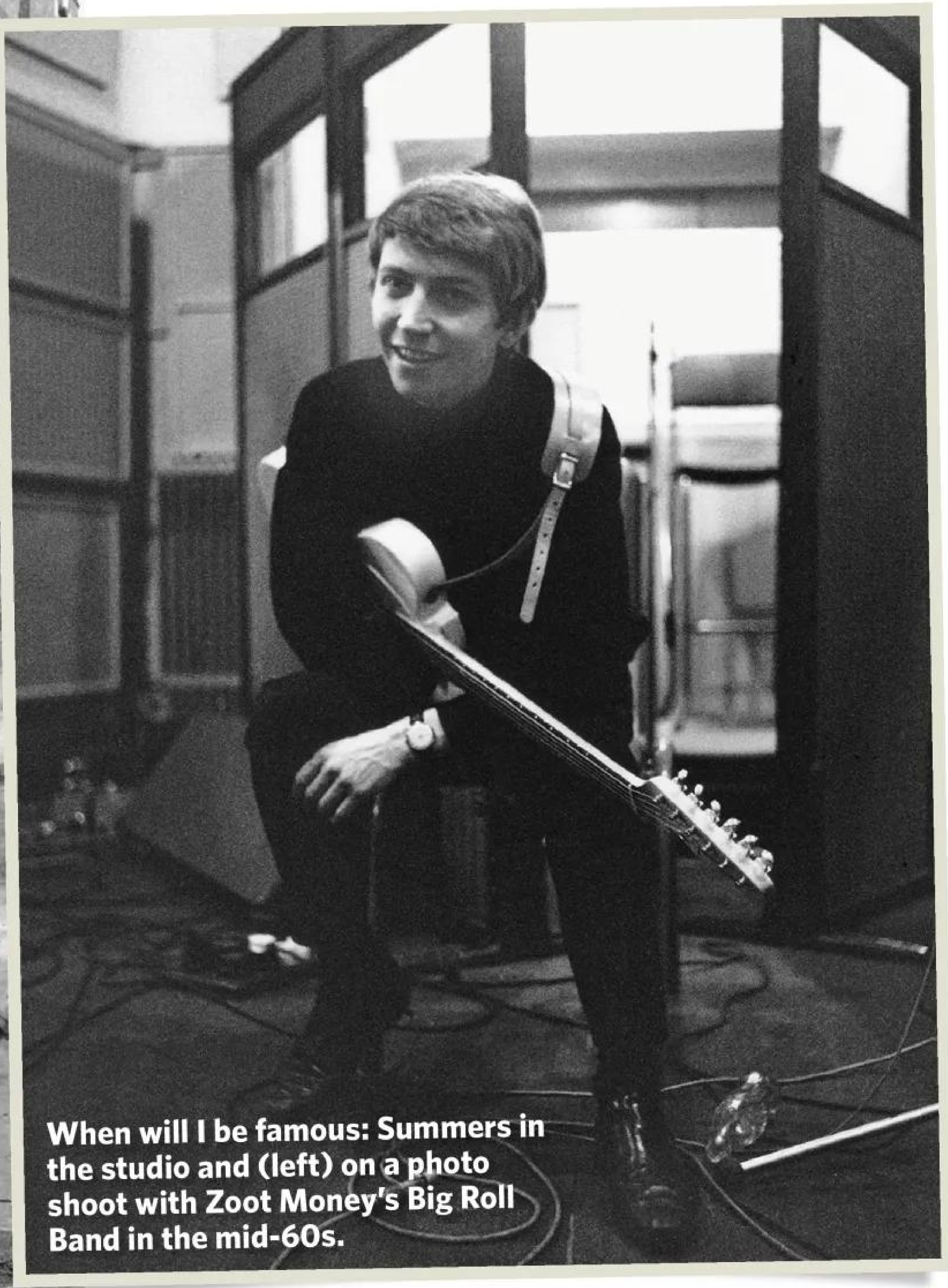

When will I be famous: Summers in the studio and (left) on a photo shoot with Zoot Money's Big Roll Band in the mid-60s.

Stewart Copeland. Sting and Copeland, along with Corsican guitarist Henry Padovani, were already operating as The Police, and invited Summers to join. After a very brief spell as a four-piece, Summers supplanted the barely competent Padovani in The Police and within six years they were the biggest band in the world.

Tomorrow Summers flies to London, where he will open his latest photography show, Harmonics Of The Night/A Series Of Glances, at the Leica Gallery in Mayfair. Previously he has exhibited in the US, Japan, Australia, Canada, France and Spain. He has a tie-in book being published, too, also titled *A Series Of Glances*.

He answers the phone sounding interrupted, somewhat grumpy, but he warms up talking about his photography. "'Passion' is actually the wrong word for it," he says. "And it's not a mere hobby, but a whole other part of my life."

When did you start taking photographs seriously?

In 1979, when I was relentlessly on tour with The Police. We were surrounded by photographers all the time. Pretty much all of them women. I started to get interested in their cameras and gear. It was all very groovy and hip. They'd all turn up dressed in black, shouting instructions. I started when we arrived in New York. It gave me something to do.

Even at that point, I told myself: "I'm going to get good at this." I had no idea I'd any talent for it, but I became quite fanatical. It's like playing music, you get better at it if you do it a lot and if you study. I was very lucky, I was in New York a great deal and I became friends with probably the world's greatest photographer, Ralph Gibson. He mentored me, and because of my friendship with him I got very deep into the inner circle of photography at the time.

In many of your photographs there's a sense of melancholy and loneliness, particularly in those of hotel rooms. Is that the lot of the touring musician?

"I got given a Telecaster, and that turned everything around for me."

Well, yes. Also, I don't want to take funny photographs. It must be something that either catches me in a formal, photographic way, or in an emotional way. You can get shitty pictures of hotel rooms, or you can make them a bit more artful. The subject matter in a way is secondary to one's visual sense. You can make the seemingly more ordinary appear interesting. I suppose you could say I have an eye for it.

Tell me about an arresting photograph of yours titled *Man Horse*. The two subjects of the title are almost up to their necks in the ocean, together but facing in opposite directions. As if posed in the surf. What was going on there?

That's a favourite of mine. It was a great moment. One's mind was prepared. Me, Stewart and Sting were fudging around the edge of the island of Montserrat. We had gone out on a little picnic. The only way you could get around to the spot we'd chosen was by boat. As we arrived at the beach, I spotted that guy leading his horse into the ocean. I immediately saw there was something extraordinary there, a picture. I leapt over the side of the boat, up to my chin in water too, and took a few shots of the guy and his horse. There must be some sort of hook for a photograph to come off, like a song.

What images from your childhood come to you most vividly?

I grew up in the English countryside. So they would be typical of the time: playing in the woods and wearing cowboy outfits, hiding in trees and all that kind of normal stuff. England was somewhat more rural and wilder then. I grew up by a beautiful river and a mill house. I spent my childhood out in nature. A real nature boy.

Can you recall the first piece of music that struck you, and why?

It would be something like *Wonderful Copenhagen*. I saw the film it was taken from with Danny Kaye [*Hans Christian Andersen*, 1952]. It's a very melodic, lovely, upbeat piece. I learnt to play it on the piano. I played a lot of music as a kid. Piano and then guitar. I had piano lessons at the insistence of my mother. I guess I was a natural musician. It's a gift. You're born with it. You can learn art forms, but there's an inherent aspect you must have. I tried being a painter for a few years. I finally stopped after five or six years because I realised it wasn't

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Summers's photo *Man Horse*, one of his favourites, which he took in Montserrat.

natural to me. I could sort of create a good painting with oils, but I hadn't got the 'thing' born into my hands. Same with music. You can learn and get pretty good at it, but you're never going to be better than the person who has it naturally.

When was the first time you played music in front of an audience?
I was eleven or twelve, singing and playing on guitar an old folk song called *Tom Dooley* in front of the whole school. That was when the bug bit, as a boy, and it's never left me. If you were a kid with a guitar and you got up on stage, you were an attraction. The string of girls grew hugely at that point. I quickly grasped that part of it as well.

As a teenager, you started to play around Bournemouth with Zoot Money, and then the two of you went off together to London. What did you think of London in 1962?
It was an incredibly scary place. Zoot and me had a thing and it was me who prompted the move. I said to him: "We have to go to London." We didn't know how we were going to survive. We didn't know anything. Somehow we got ourselves a basement flat in West Kensington. Then we got our drummer up from Bournemouth, and were put in touch with a second guy, Paul Williams. Paul didn't play an instrument, but we needed a bass player and he offered. He'd never even picked a bass up, but he was another natural musician. It was very risky stuff, because we didn't have a gig at all.

We managed to land an audition at a place called the Flamingo Club in Soho for a guy named Rick Gunnell. He offered us a gig as the new house band. We were good. Zoot was a great singer. From there we started playing all over the country. We still weren't even out of our teens. The Flamingo Club was very dodgy. It was a late-night place, the audience mostly criminals. Prostitutes, drug dealers, the Kray twins. Boy, talk about being chucked into Dante's Inferno. We played six sets a night. An incredible training ground to a drunk, stoned, out-of-order crowd, packed to the brim. Eric Clapton also played there. John Mayall, Peter Green and Albert Lee, too. It was the nest we all came from.

From there you leapt into the head trip of Dantalian's Chariot.
The ridiculously named Dantalian's Chariot. It was the glorious sixties, and you wanted to be a part of all that. What can I tell you, there were a lot of drugs around in the scene.

"I was too educated for punk rock, too good for it. On another planet."

So we abandoned our great rhythm and blues band. I mean, it's a bit tragic when you think back on it, but that's life. Being young and making terrible mistakes. We started to play at places like Middle Earth, The Roundhouse. The acid era.

There was so much stuff opening to us in the moment. There were a lot of influences going on. We began to embrace world music. Ravi Shankar. The Beatles discovering Indian music. Miles Davis was playing a more modal sort of music. John Coltrane and Bill Evans were around. That was what was musically in the air. We moved away from Ray Charles and James Brown and into this droning kind of music. I got to play these long, psychedelic guitar solos. Not the twelve-bar blues, but something else altogether. It was the whole ethos of the period, and it suited me very much."

Going off to formally study music can't have been typical of the time?
I'd just had enough of the band thing. I'd done it for five years. I came to the US with Soft Machine, and then after I left them I was in The Animals. From being in West Kensington, I was suddenly living in Laurel Canyon with Eric Burdon. It was a totally different scene, very trippy. A head-turning experience. The thing with Eric came to an end and I came back to England. But I didn't like it. I went straight back out to California. Everything changed for me. I was in LA. I had an LA girlfriend. I was a very serious musician and I just wanted to get deeper into musical theory. I did that and I really enjoyed going to college.

This quest for self-improvement seems to have been a constant theme.
All the time. It's a lifetime of improvement. At college I played classical guitar, studied harmony. It was being submerged in the thing itself, not just trying to get your face out on stage. I'd had all of that already. All the ridiculous scenarios you go through, the sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. I studied and played guitar relentlessly, until the whole thing wore out and I had to come back to London once more. It was a fertile period. Like the cliché where you go out into the desert for forty days and come back renewed. I got given a Telecaster, too, and that turned the whole thing around for me again.

Back in London, you did sessions for a range of artists including Joan Armatrading, Jon Lord, David Essex and easy-listening ▷

Summers and photographer Ralph Gibson at their exhibition Light Strings: Impressions Of The Guitar in 2004.

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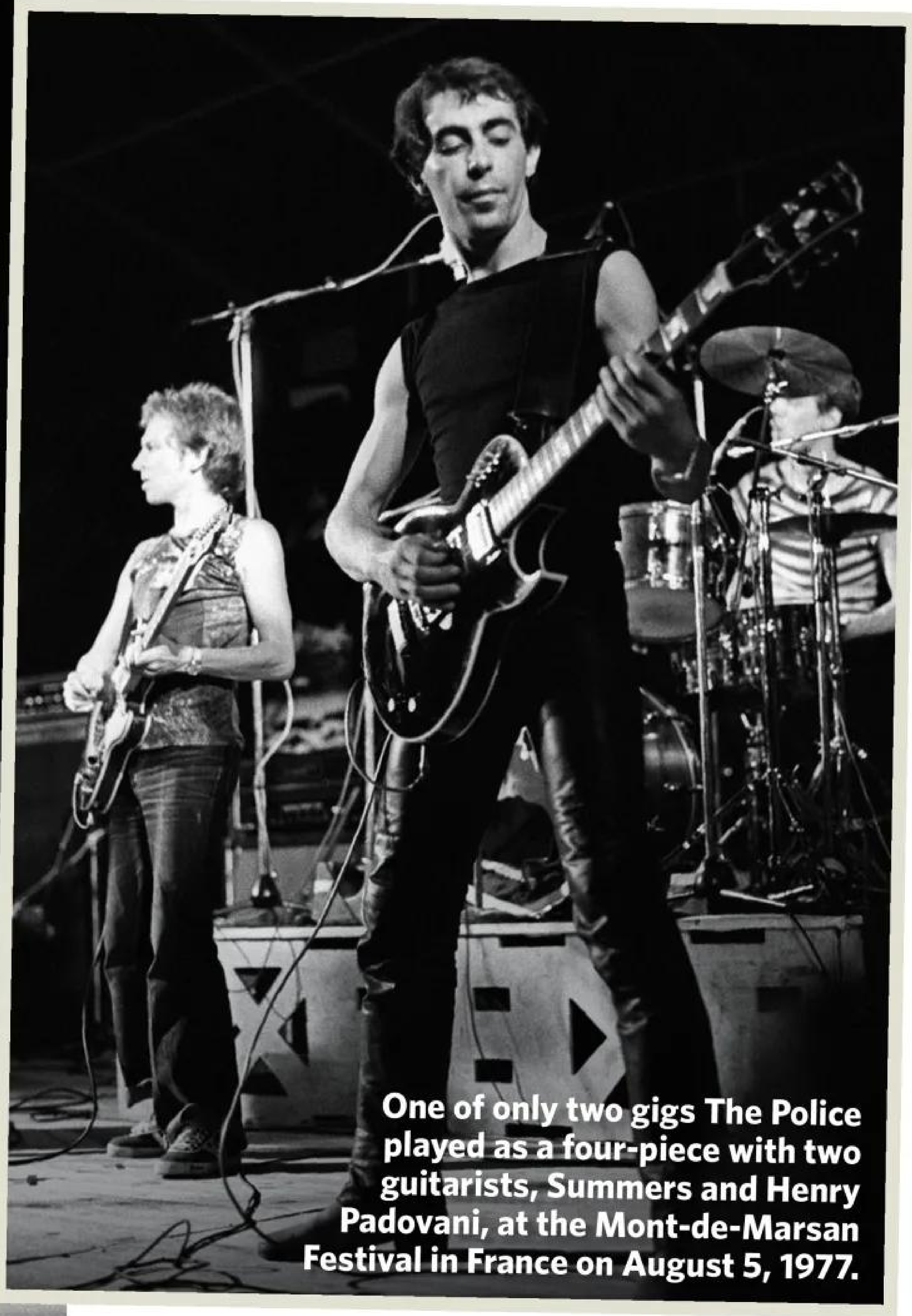
High jumps and high jinks: The Police in 1981


One of only two gigs The Police played as a four-piece with two guitarists, Summers and Henry Padovani, at the Mont-de-Marsan Festival in France on August 5, 1977.

star Neil Sedaka. What did those jobs mean to you at the time?
Nothing much besides survival. I was able to play pretty much anything with anybody by then, so that's what I did. Playing with Neil Sedaka was great fun, and it came to me exactly when I was in desperate need of money. It was a great offer. We did the Royal Festival Hall. Neil adored me and we got on very well. He's a great songwriter and an extremely good musician. He can play the shit out of the piano.

Summers joining The Police was a halting affair. He heard an early version of *Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic* at Mike Howlett's house. Howlett played it to him on a tape recorder in his bedroom. "I thought it was rubbish," Summers proclaims. "Henry Padovani could hardly play. By coincidence, I'd also met Stewart once before, up in Newcastle. I was doing a gig with Kevin Ayers, and he was there playing with Curved Air. We all ended up in the same hotel. Lying on the floor of one room, smoking and drinking beer and looking up at the ceiling. I remember thinking: 'Boy, that guy can talk.'"

"I was working with two total arseholes [in The Police]."

Despite his first impressions, Summers kept in touch with Sting after Strontium 90 dissolved. Eventually, Sting coerced him into The Police, initially as the band's second guitarist. They played only a couple of gigs as a four-piece, touting themselves as a punk band. "Stewart was very intent upon being punk," Summers says. "Henry seemed to fit that much more than I did. I was too educated for punk rock, too good for it. On another planet. Poor Henry got the boot, and I went into it full-time."

Copeland's elder brother, Miles, who soon progressed to being their manager, put up the £1,500 it cost them to make their debut album, *Outlandos d'Amour*. They recorded intermittently over a six-month period from January 1978, holed up at a poky studio in Leatherhead, Surrey, above a dairy.

A&M Records signed them on the strength of the song *Roxanne*, but initially at least, The Police were a slow burn. The album scarcely made a ripple upon its release in November 1978. It took six more months, and reissues of *Roxanne* and *Can't Stand Losing You*, for them to achieve lift-off.

How accurate did your first impressions of The Police prove to be?
I felt there was something there. Sting and Stewart were both pretty rough players. They were supposed to be a punk band, but they weren't really. They were playing with the attitude of punk, though, so it was very fast and a bit out of time. Not really all that good. But I kept going with it. The first time I thought "Hang on a minute…" was when Sting told me he'd got this new song he wanted to show me, which was *Visions Of The Night*. There was an edge to it, and I found it exciting. Not tired at all, full of energy.

Apparently Miles Copeland was afraid that your joining would damage The Police's punk cred.
He was dead wrong. Miles is full of it. There's a difference between attitude, and trying to be what's current, and real music. I saved the band's life. Basically, Sting came to life when I joined. All the songs started to come out. The natural ability he had could be released through me. It never would have happened with Henry.

At one early point, weren't you lined up to record with John Cale?
John was supposed to be the record producer. But he turned up and he was drunk out of his mind. Hopeless. It just didn't work out. I think he pissed off after about half an hour. Nothing came of it. Later I found myself on a TV show with John in Spain. On that occasion he rolled around on the floor and tried to stick an ▷

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"If you were a kid with a guitar and you got up on stage, you were an attraction. The string of girls grew hugely at that point."

TERRY O'NEILL/ICONIC IMAGES

Summers and Robert Fripp recorded two albums together in the early 80s.

Summers with The Police at an in-store appearance in California in 1979.

American Express card up his nose, because it had cocaine on it. Talented guy, but it all went a bit south for him.

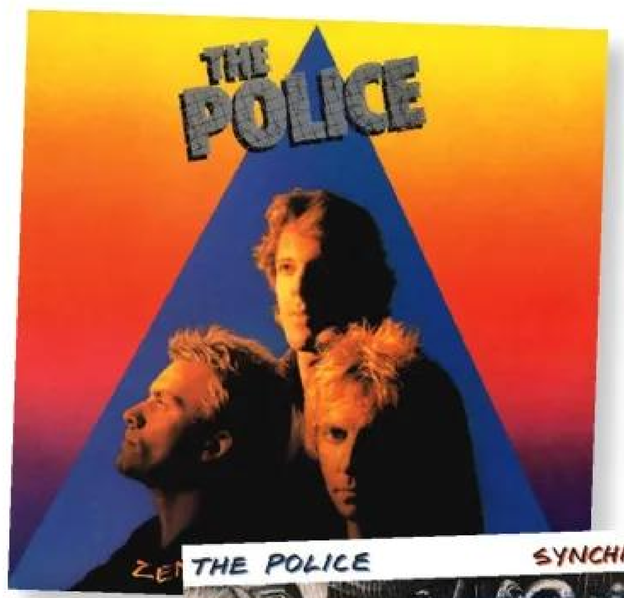
In 1979 The Police undertook their breakthrough US tour cooped in a Ford transit van. What did you learn from being in such proximity to each other?
That I was working with two total arseholes. I struggled on. It's usually humour that saves the day. When you spend as much time as we did together, 24/7, and you're travelling hundreds of miles a day in a van, you develop a collective mind. It's very dark, and funny usually. Very ironic and deprecating. You kind of bond through the travel. We weren't fighting for five hundred miles. It would mostly be irony, shit food and trying to sleep. That's the life in the initial stages, at least. It's not the life any more, believe you me.

Sting was the band's songwriter. The actual songs, though, were the work of the three of you in the band, weren't they?
Absolutely. Let's call them tracks. The Police's tracks were made because of the chemistry that existed between the three of us. There's no way you can duplicate that. Of course, it's been said five million times over: "We could have done that." Well, you couldn't, and you didn't. The Police was a one-off. If one guy had disappeared from the three, it wouldn't have happened. Take *Every Breath You Take*. God, it wasn't even going to go on the *Synchronicity* record until I put that guitar part on it.

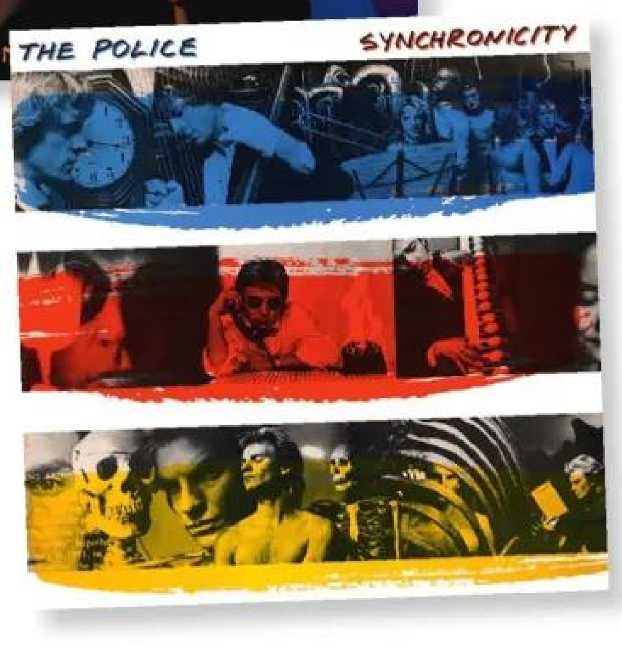
"Proper marriages don't go with a band at the fantastical point we were at."

You did win a Grammy for *Behind My Camel*, the instrumental track you contributed to the third Police album, 1980's *Zenyatta Mondatta*.
I did. And I was very pleased. But I could have won a Grammy for anything at that point. I could have farted and it would have got a Grammy.

Following on from 1979's *Regatta de Blanc* (*Message In A Bottle, Walking On The Moon*), *Zenyatta Mondatta* (*Don't Stand So Close To Me, De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*) was the second of four consecutive UK No.1 albums for The Police. Their fifth and final studio album, 1983's *Synchronicity*, also topped the *Billboard* chart in the US. They supported *Synchronicity* with a stadium tour of the US, including a 70,000 sell-out at Shea Stadium in NYC. But by then the three of them were already breaking up. Relations between them had become so strained that they had made *Synchronicity* from three separate rooms at AIR Studios in Monserrat. They reconvened in London in July 1986, meaning to make a new record. But the sessions soon collapsed, and soon after The Police disbanded.



From 1978 to 1983 you kept up a relentless recording and touring schedule with The Police.
It was a whirlwind. We were so incredibly popular, not just in England but everywhere in the world. Japan, even fucking India. All over. Basically we were always on tour. We never stopped. We were making a lot of money, so the manager never wanted us to rest. It was exhilarating and wonderful, and exhausting. An amazing experience. To be that popular and that recognised everywhere you went. It got so you couldn't leave the house in the end. Or a hotel room. It was this sort of clichéd, fantasy world and we inhabited it for a very long time. It's gone now, all changed with the internet. I think we had the height of the golden period, the glory years.



The flip-side to working to such a degree is the personal toll. You went through a divorce in 1981. How can you ever weigh that cost?
It's a very hard thing to balance. There's the shadow side to it. I was married, we had a baby. My very smart and successful wife, Kate, after we got to a point, she told me: "That's it. I've had enough. Not any more for me." You can imagine

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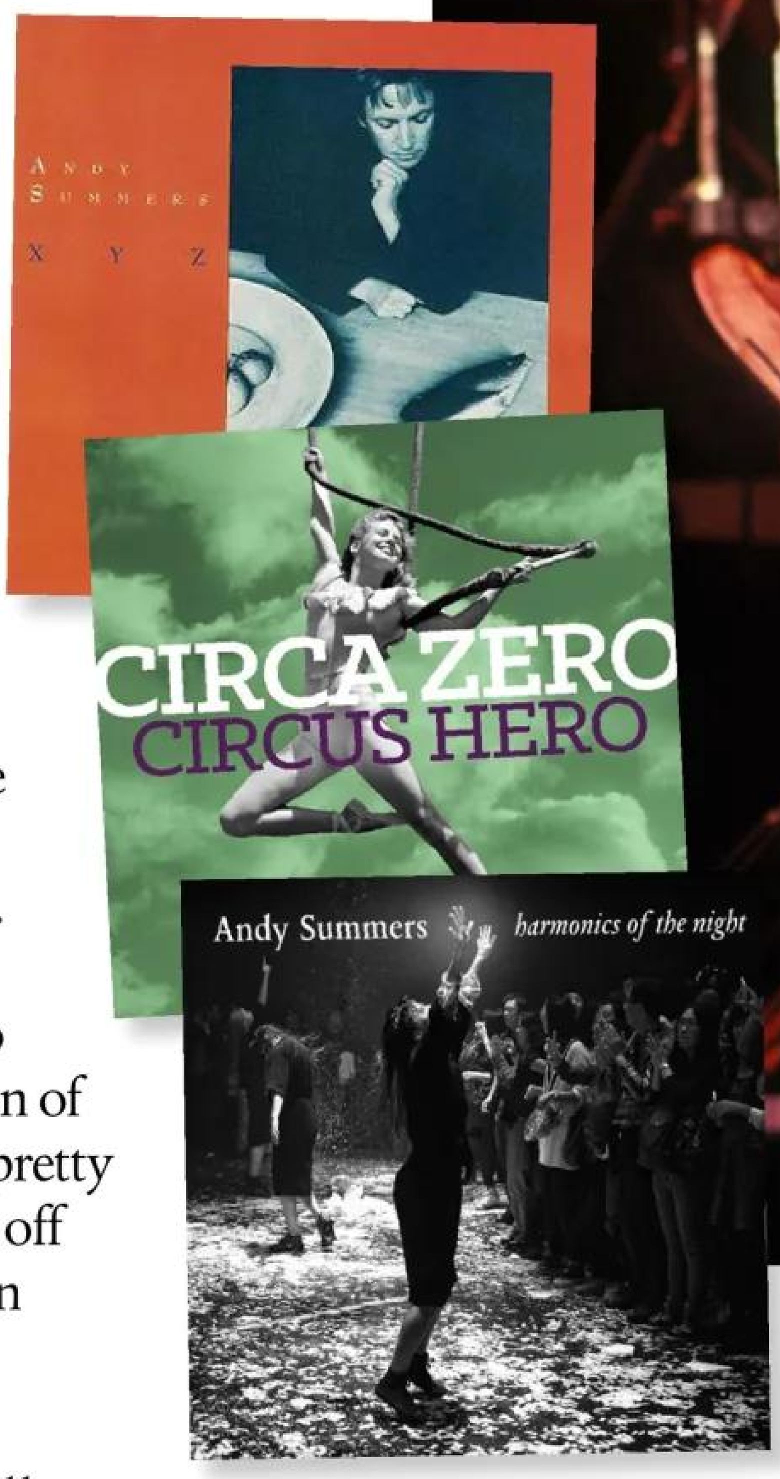
Circa Zero, May 2014: (l-r) Summers, Rob Giles, Frederik Bokkenheuser.

Summers with The Police playing to a sold-out Shea Stadium in 1983.

the life I was leading. If you're a woman, married to a bloke, and he's got hundreds of other women coming after him every day… I don't have to be explicit here. You see where I'm going. Trying to balance that with a wife and a kid. And I'd had to go into tax exile. So yes, we got divorced. Same with Sting and Stewart. They both got divorced too. Proper partnerships and marriages don't go with a band at the fantastical point we were at. The happy part for me is Kate and I got back together four years later, once the insanity was all over.

How seriously did the three of you try to make a follow-up to *Synchronicity*?
That was a complete fuck-up. Everyone was desperate for us to get together again. Sting was off on his own. He'd made his solo record [1985's *The Dream Of The Blue Turtles*]. We were going to have a trial run at a studio in North London. Stewart went out on a horse the day before we started. Stewart was playing polo in those days. He fell off the horse, broke his collar bone and couldn't play the drums. That was the end of it. And Sting didn't want to write new songs. So all we did was a wanky new version of *Don't Stand So Close To Me*. It was a pretty limp affair. If Stewart hadn't come off his bloody horse it could have been a different story.



What's the immediate sense you have when you've been through such an intense experience and then, at a stroke, it's vanished from your life?
A huge sense of loss. I found it incredible. After all the noise and adulation for years on end, suddenly it's not there any more. You are now famous. What are you going to do? Start all over again, go back to the music. And I did. I made *XYZ* [his first solo album of 1987]. Then I moved back out to California and started to make instrumental records. So my recovery was all through the music. In my case, I did get back with my wife, and Kate got pregnant with twins. I got a studio. It was sort of a rebuilding of a life. The difference being, now you've got some money and you're well-known, and so everyone's interested still. It wasn't as if you were starting from ground zero. You just had to be very good with whatever you put out.

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Altogether, Summers has made 13 solo albums, most of them instrumental, the latest being 2021's *Harmonics Of The Night*. He had already put down a marker when still a member of The Police, recording a brace of instrumental albums in collaboration with Robert Fripp: 1982's *I Advanced Masked* and 1984's *Bewitched*. In 2013 he formed another trio, Circa Zero, and with them recorded 2014's one-off album *Circus Hero*. He also has six film scores to his name, and has written two books: his 2006 memoir *One Train Later*, and a 2021's *Fretted And Moaning*, a collection of short stories.

Inevitably, he has never got close to eclipsing The Police. In 2003 the band were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Four years later, on the evening of February 11, Summers, Sting and Copeland were reunited on stage as The Police, opening the 2007 Grammy Awards ceremony at the Staples Centre in LA. That May, they launched The Police Reunion Tour with two shows in Vancouver, Canada. The tour ran for more than a year and ended up being the third-highest-grossing of all time. On stage they sounded rejuvenated. The intangible alchemy going on between the three of them just as potent.

"I could have farted and it would have got a Grammy."

Yet by the time of the final show, at New York's Madison Square Garden, they were also as far apart as ever. They haven't played together since. In the intervening period from then to now, silence, except for the current re-release of The Police's *Greatest Hits* on double vinyl. Better than anything, it's this compilation that sums The Police up. ▷

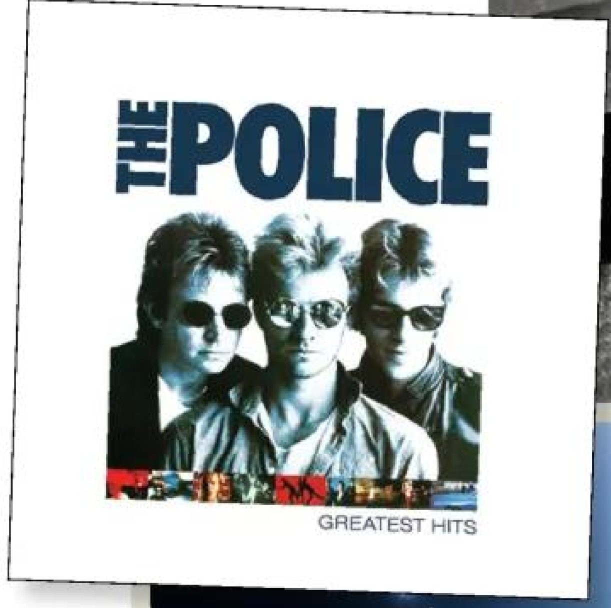
The Police being inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2003.

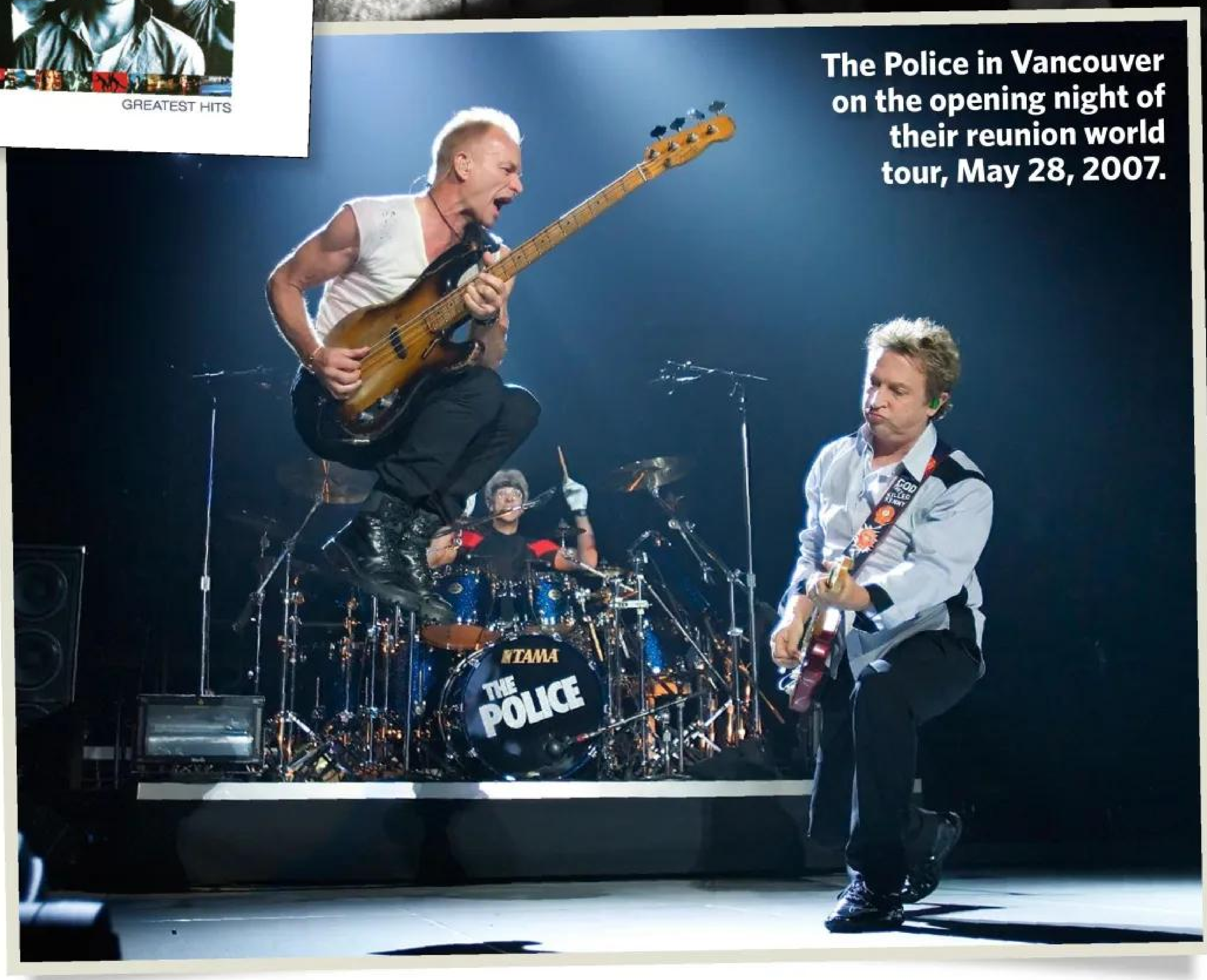
It'll be alright on the night: The Police at rehearsals for the Grammy awards in 2007: (l-r) Sting, Stewart Copeland, Andy Summers.

Sixteen songs, the most recent 40 years old, but unforgettable and indelible still.

Pointedly, Miles Copeland wasn't invited to return as The Police's manager. How else had things changed between the 1980s and the reunion tour?

It was all kind of technical. Going back to the early days, I'd just turn up with my guitar and amp, and that was it. We were now in a whole different ball game. Stewart had a gigantic set-up. I had a complicated set-up, a very advanced pedal board and operated remotely off stage. Very slick. Sting had his thing going on. So each one of us had his guy, or guys, to oversee his own technical side. You could call it three different universes. But they all came together to create one thing. You couldn't have done it any other way. It wasn't the way we started, but it's the way we ended up.





The Police in Vancouver on the opening night of their reunion world tour, May 28, 2007.

The reunion shows also emphasised how powerful the three of you are as a band. How difficult was it to once again let go of something that good?

If it was up to me I wouldn't have let it go. It's an interesting subject, and to do with fragility, frailty, ego and all that. I thought we could have gone on and played for years. We could have made some great new records. I don't want to say too much more, because it'll get too personal. It's sad. We could have done more, but it wasn't to be. One of the greatest bands of all-time got short shrift, I'm afraid to say.

"I wouldn't have let The Police go. It's an interesting subject to do with fragility, frailty, ego and all that. It's sad."

All those songs aren't about to be forgotten, though, are they?

That's why it's one of the greatest bands in history. The songs won't go away. *Every Breath You Take* has passed one and a half billion plays on Spotify. It's amazing when you consider the circumstances it was made in. I've just finished a fourth tour of Brazil with Call The Police (with whom he's joined by two Brazilian musicians: bassist/singer Rodrigo Santos and Joao Barone on drums). We do all the Police hits and we're really very good together. We were killing it every night of the tour. Mob scenes. You go: "Wow, how can this be?" It's a very enjoyable thing to do once a year.

To come full circle and go back to your photographs. When you look at them, what do they tell you about yourself?

That at least I've got something to do when I'm out on the road. I'm not the sort of person who sits in his room and watches TV. As well as purely enjoying playing guitar, and being in a band, I have this other sub-set going on in my mind. I've a certain sort of energy I get from that. It shows me I'm alive. It keeps me alive. The act of creativity is all-important to me. I feel as if I must be making something all the time. Not that I'm a nutter, or work-obsessed. Guitar, writing and photography. Those are the three things I do. That's enough.

So what's next?

I'm planning on making another record. I've never gone so long without doing one. Covid got in the way. I'm working on a TV series, too, about guitar riffs. I can't say too much more about it at this point, but it's going to happen in the next three or four months, I expect. I don't want to stop. Having said that, I'm probably going to go off now and end up watching the fucking telly.

The Police's Greatest Hits is out now via UPC. Summers's exhibition Harmonics Of The Night/A Series Of Glances was exhibited in London and Munich in 2023. For future exhibition dates, see andysummers.com

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